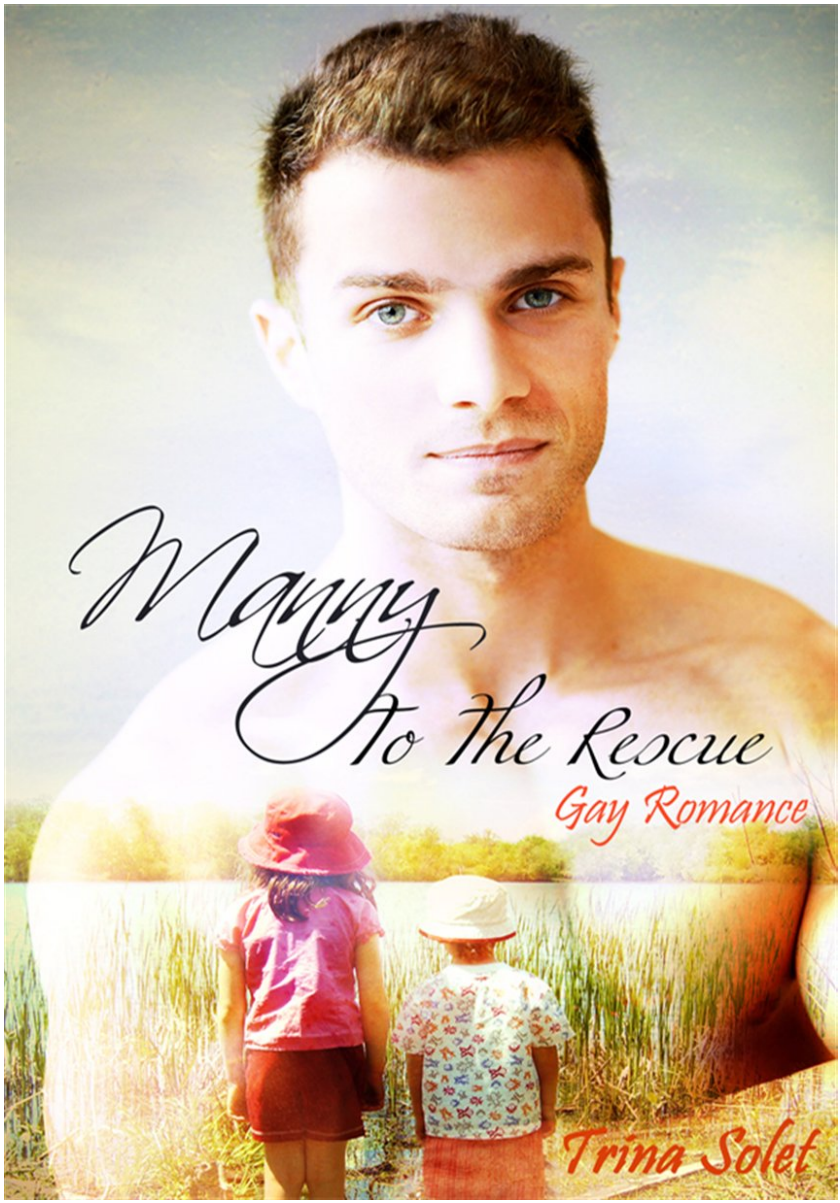
Manny
To the Rescue
Gay Romance
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Manny To The Rescue: Gay Romance

By Trina Solet

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Manny To The Rescue

Gay Romance

Trina Solet

Chapter 1

The alarm never woke him any more, not since he moved in with his mom to help take care of his nieces. For the last two years, Owen Wakefield had been jolted awake by the sounds of something getting dropped or knocked down, the sounds of laughing or arguing, or like this morning, the sounds of tiny, running feet. The feet kept going back and forth, back and forth until he couldn't take it any more.

Owen threw off the covers. After a quick visit to the bathroom, he grabbed his phone and walked out into the hallway. Maggie was there, holding two stuffed bears straight out in front of her and running up and down the hallway outside his bedroom door.

"What explains this?" Owen asked her.

"They're racing," Maggie said of the bears and just kept going.

"Let me know who wins," Owen told her and went in search of Connie.

Maggie, who was blond like her mother, had turned four over the summer. Connie was six with auburn hair and dark eyes just like her dad and Uncle Owen. Connie was the ringleader, the troublemaker, the evil mastermind. Going into the kitchen, Owen found her making a Fruit Loops necklace. OK, so she wasn't living up to her reputation at the moment other than for the Fruit Loops spilled on the kitchen table and a few on the floor. Owen kissed her cheek and asked her what was going on.

"I'm making the winning necklace for the bear who wins the race," Connie explained.

"And how long is Maggie supposed to run out there?" Owen wanted to know though he wasn't worried that she was disturbing her grandmother. She was probably already up and doing last minute packing.

"Till someone wins," Connie said.

"We might need to declare a tie at some point. We are taking your grandma to the airport in a couple of hours," Owen reminded her.

"I know," Connie said. Her face turned gloomy.

Owen knew she and Maggie were going to miss their grandmother. Looking through the kitchen door, he saw Mom's suitcases already by the front door.

"Don't use up all the cereal for that necklace," Owen told Connie as he got the coffee going.

After giving the girls breakfast, Owen had gotten dressed and was checking work emails. There was a problem with a sale of a townhouse. The closing was supposed to be next week. If the buyers couldn't sort out

the financing, it might not happen. The doorbell interrupted him in mid-groan.

"Can you get that? It's for me. I'll be right there!" his mom yelled from her bedroom upstairs.

When Owen opened the front door, he found himself staring at a familiar face. The blue eyes were bright, clear and so hard to look away from. The hair was light brown, short and unruly. There was also an awesome body that Owen tried not to dwell on. A winning smile completed the picture of a gorgeous but unaffected guy – Dan Resnick.

"Dan," he said. "Hi, it's been a while." Owen tried not to look like he was checking him out.

"It's kind of a weird reversal, right?" Dan said.

Owen had no idea what he meant. "Reversal?"

That's when his mother came down the stairs. She already looked perfectly put together for her honeymoon trip except she was still in her robe.

"Dan, sweetie, so punctual. Too bad I'm not. Busy packing toiletries." She gave Dan a hug. "Wish you could have made it to the wedding. Well, come and sit." She invited him into the living room.

Owen was about to go his own way when his mother took him by the arm and said, "You too, honey."

Owen was confused as he was hustled into the living room.

"Tell Owen why you're here, sweetie," she instructed Dan.

"He doesn't know?" Dan said, taken aback. He looked over at Owen helplessly.

"He will in a minute. And hurry up. I have a plane to catch," she said.

"I'm going to be helping you with the girls?" Dan said or asked.

Owen looked over at his mother.

"And Dan will be living here as well," his mom added. "You know we sold Lisa's house. The poor boy is homeless." Lisa was Dan's mother and Mom's best friend. She had moved away after she got married. Dan was staying at the house until it was sold, and now...

Owen was speechless as he looked from his mother to Dan. Dan raised his hands as if to say, "This is not on me. She's your mother."

Owen finally got his voice back. "So you're doing a job interview hours before you leave for your honeymoon?" he said to his mother in disbelief.

"Don't be silly. I am not doing the interview. You are. I'm already sold on Dan a hundred percent. I've known him since he was a little kid and I trust him implicitly. The interview is for your benefit, sweetheart. You two have fun," she said and left them alone.

Owen motioned Dan over to the window seat for this non-interview.

"So that's what you meant about a reversal," Owen realized. When Owen was in high school and Dan was eight or so, Owen's mother strong-armed him into babysitting Dan while their mothers went out. It was just that one time. Owen had seen him a few times since then. Their mothers were good friends, but the two of them barely knew each other.

"I remember you being very strict about my bedtime," Dan said like he was still holding a grudge for being hustled off to bed at nine on the dot.

"I wanted to watch the *Oz* finale, and I wanted you fast asleep."

"*Oz* – too rich for my blood at that age," Dan admitted.

Owen sighed, trying to absorb what was happening. "I can't believe Mom pulled this crap."

"Sorry," Dan said. "But you do need help, don't you? Kate said she didn't have a definite return date."

"Mom saw pictures of Kostas' home town – whitewashed houses and rocky beaches. A picture of him shirtless on his boat cinched the deal. She decided not to bother with a return ticket."

"She told me you encouraged her to go," Dan said.

"She devoted herself to the girls for the last few years. I thought she deserved it."

"You're not such a bad son," Dan said. "So you had a Greek wedding. They're supposed to be fun."

"Not if it's your mother's," Owen said to him sourly. He liked Kostas, but his mother running off was a huge headache.

"I know what you mean," Dan said, commiserating with him.

"That's right. Your mom got married recently. Sorry I couldn't make it to the wedding. Connie had a cold."

"I missed your mom's wedding too. Mom and my brother were only in town for the day. I wanted to take Jason to see our great-grandmother on our dad's side. She's in a nursing home. I think she's having a lesbian affair with one of the other ladies over there. A lesbian great-grandmother, how cool is that?"

That's when the girls ran in. Seeing Dan, they stopped and peered at him curiously.

"Who's this? Is he your boyfriend?" Connie asked.

"No," Owen told her as Dan grinned at him.

"Is he Grandma's boyfriend?" Maggie asked.

"Your grandmother is married," Owen told her. Maggie showed no understanding of how that was relevant.

"He's too young to be Grandma's boyfriend," Connie said to Maggie.

"And she's married," Owen told the girls though his point didn't seem to be getting through.

"Who is he then?" Connie asked.

"What's his name?" Maggie asked, never one to be left out of the conversation.

"His name is Dan."

"Dan! Dan, the man!" Maggie said excitedly, and both girls jumped up and down.

"Dan, the man. It's him. He's going to be our manny!" Connie said.

Maggie kept on jumping and started singing, "Dan, the man! Dan, the manny! Dan, the man! Dan, the manny!"

"Is this a conspiracy?" Owen asked the girls. He couldn't believe they knew about this before he did.

In answer to his question, Connie said no, Maggie said yes then Maggie said no, and Connie said yes. They went on like that until Owen told them, "The correct answer is yes. Now let me and Dan talk."

"He's supposed to play with us. That's his job," Connie said.

Maggie nodded. They each grabbed Dan by the hand, ready to drag him away.

"Girls, leave Dan alone. Go eat breakfast."

They went reluctantly then Maggie started her "Dan, the man" chant again and danced her way into the kitchen.

"You still want the job? I won't always be here to protect you, you know," Owen said to Dan.

"Aren't you afraid to be left alone with them?"

"Terrified. Mom has been in charge of the girls all this time. I had a more auxiliary function like a dad from the 1950's. or an uncle from the 1950's. When Mom cut back on her hours at the office, I had to take over more. Now that she's leaving on an extended, indefinite honeymoon, I'll be swamped. Though Yolanda is in charge at the office too. She's the one who sold your house from under you," Owen said, not wanting the blame.

"I knew it was going to get sold, but I expected to have a job lined up before then. I couldn't stay at my old job, and another one fell through at the last minute."

"What were you doing at your last job?" Owen asked, almost making it sound like an actual job interview.

"I parked cars for the valet service at Crystal Gardens Mall."

"Fancy. Are you going to college full time?"

"I am. Your mom said the girls are in school and preschool at the same time so it should work out."

"I remember hearing about a scholarship, right?" Owen's mom had said something about it.

"That's right. So I have tuition covered. I thought I had things figured out. I had this apartment lined up, sharing with three other guys. Then, two days before I'm to start at the new job, I get a call telling me there was a problem, and they went with a different candidate. I was scrambling to find something else. When your mom dropped by the house to say goodbye, I told her I was looking for a job and a place to live. Kate said she could solve both of my problems. She knew I used to help take care of my little brother and decided that counted as childcare experience. And here I am."

"You really don't have anywhere to go?" Owen asked since Mom had called him homeless.

"I'll figure something out," Dan said, looking a little crestfallen.

"I'm not saying I don't want to hire you," Owen told him. He hated to see him disappointed. "It's just weird to jump straight into a live-in situation. But if this doesn't work out, you won't be out on the street or anything. I'll make sure you have somewhere to stay."

"Thanks."

Owen thought about what to do. "Why don't we try it out for the rest of this weekend," he decided.

"Sounds OK," Dan said, brightening a little at the news.

"That includes staying here," Owen added.

"Great. That way we'll know if that's doable. I'll bring my stuff?"

"You can come back later today. I'll text you when we're back from the airport. Having you here will distract the girls from missing Mom."

Owen gave Dan a quick tour of the house. Three bedrooms upstairs, one of which Dan could have. Owen's room was downstairs next to the office. The kitchen and the living room were across the hall. As they were walking to the door, Mom came back down, looking self-satisfied.

"Is it all arranged?" she asked, beaming at them.

"Yes. By you," Owen told her.

"I don't see why I had to be a surprise," Dan said, giving her an injured look.

"I'm sorry. I had my heart set on this working out." Mom batted her eyes sweetly at him. "I just wanted to see everything taken care of before I left," she said, explaining nothing.

"Like minutes before you left," Owen said.

"My sweet boy," she called him and squeezed Owen's cheeks. Dan laughed. Then she did it to him too. The look on his face was priceless.

"Was that an initiation, a hazing?" Dan asked while Owen walked him to his car.

"One of many. Just you wait till the girls get in on the action."

Surprisingly, Dan smiled at that. "I'm kind of looking forward to it. I miss taking care of my little brother since he and Mom moved away. I thought about moving to be near them, but it's better if my stepfather and I keep a big chunk of the North American continent between us."

"There'll be a big chunk of the planet Earth between me and mom's new hubby," Owen said with a sigh.

"Maybe you'll need to be distracted from missing your mom," Dan said.

Owen looked at him in surprise, but decided he hadn't meant anything by that. A guy as gorgeous as Dan could never be interested in a boring, real estate agent.

*

Dan looked at the Wakefields' house as he pulled out of the driveway. It was a nice one, like you'd expect from people in the real estate business. It was no mansion though. Two stories with an orderly yard, it had all sorts of nice features – big windows, that bay window in the living room, a fancy railing around the porch, a gabled roof with dormer windows. Ivy was climbing one slate blue wall to surround an upstairs window. The house wasn't to his taste, but Dan could see its appeal. The inside didn't match his taste either though it was pleasant. Both homey and elegant, it was decorated in soothing colors. The furniture was refined and traditional but still comfortable. The girls had left a stamp on the place, from toys left here and there to marks on the furniture.

Dan wondered what it was going to be like living there with Owen and the girls. It was definitely going to be a challenge not to make some kind of move on Owen. Dan hadn't seen him for a while, but he had a crush on him when he was younger. How the hell could Owen look even hotter now? He was tall and lean with wavy, chestnut hair and those very dark eyes that always looked knowing and humorous. Then there was that soft, deep voice that was designed to say things like "I love you. Make me come." Damn, if the crush wasn't back. Too bad Owen would never go for a guy like him. Dan remembered hearing how he was involved with a former client who had a modest mansion in town and a bunch of others scattered around the globe. If that's the kind of guy Owen liked to date, Dan didn't stand a chance in hell.

*

Owen was still buzzing from spending time with Dan. It had been a while since being with someone had such a strong effect on him. He felt both elated and scared. Neither one of those was an appropriate response to their future manny.

"What was that?" Owen asked his mother when he went back in and found her in the kitchen, pouring herself a cup of coffee.

"That was everything working out as it should and a huge load off my mind," she told him.

"You wanted to leave me no way out."

"I didn't have time to waste. I only just came up with the idea. You had nanny candidates lined up around the block, and you didn't like any of them," she reminded him.

"None of them were right for the girls," Owen said.

"And Dan is perfect," his mother said.

She had made up her mind, and she knew Owen wasn't going to turn away a cute, young guy at the door, throw him out on the street when he had no place to live. Owen wasn't heartless. Or dickless.

Maybe Owen had a few misgivings about the arrangement, but he didn't doubt that his mother wanted only the best for the girls. His mother wouldn't hire Dan to look after Connie and Maggie without being absolutely sure of him. And Dan wasn't a stranger. Owen didn't know him well but his mom did. From their brief encounters in the past few years, Owen remembered Dan as an energetic, slightly awkward teenager, not the hunk he had seen today. He did remember Dan's bright eyes and his ready smile.

Since he had found out about his mother's plans to go to Greece, Owen knew he had to get extra help, but he had dragged his feet. He wasn't ready to trust the girls to anyone new until Dan came along. Dan was easy to say yes to. After talking to him, everything fell into place for Owen. He was the first person he could see taking care of the girls.

Did that mean that his mom did the right thing? Absolutely not! Owen wasn't going to admit to his mom that he was glad she railroaded him into hiring a beautiful, sweet guy. But if he was going to have a manny, why not a hot one? The answer was because it was going to drive him crazy.

While Mom and the girls were getting ready to go to the airport, Owen received a call, and it wasn't good news for their clients. The sale of their townhouse definitely wasn't going to happen. Owen was in the office,

emailing Yolanda about it when Connie came at him brandishing a sock like it was a weapon.

"It's a lonely sock. I can't find the other one," she said.

Owen had told the girls not to bother their grandmother while she was getting ready. This was the result.

"Just pick a different pair," Owen told her, turning back to the computer screen.

"It's the only one left. Do the laundry," she demanded.

"You do the laundry," he told her automatically.

"I can't reach to press the buttons."

"Good. Don't mess around with appliances. Borrow some socks from Maggie," Owen told her.

"Her socks are too small. She's a midget."

"She's just little. Find some that fit."

Connie had just left and now Maggie was running to him, distraught, her blond curls bouncing.

"Uncle Owen, Connie is stealing my socks!"

"She's not stealing. She's borrowing."

Maggie made a whiny noise then ran away probably to fight with Connie about socks. Listening to them, Owen thought how nice it would be to have someone to dump this on. It was going to be good to have a manny. Despite being railroaded, Owen was relieved not to be left alone with the girls. Having Dan living there with them was bound to be weird mostly because he was so attractive. Being around him, Owen was going to have trouble keeping a decent thought in his head.

The next time Owen opened the front door, he was greeted with an accent and a bear hug. Kostas was solidly built, easy to get along with, and always ready to indulge the girls and Mom too. Too bad Mom met him right after he sold his chain of electronics stores and had the time and money to take her away to his native Greece. What terrible timing. Actually Owen had encouraged his mother to follow her heart and her dreams. When it came to taking care of the girls, he had taken a back seat long enough.

And Kostas was a great guy. He made the girls laugh the whole way to the airport and once they got there. He never gave them a chance to get sad. Mom left with a smile on her face though Owen could tell how hard she fought not to cry. Once the girls lost sight of her, the waterworks started. Maggie was first, and Owen picked her up.

"No crying," Connie reprimanded her little sister while starting to cry herself.

"It's OK. A little crying is OK," Owen told her and picked her up too. With both girls hanging around his neck, sniffling, he was too busy trying to breathe to even worry about being sad himself. Then he remembered his ace in the hole. "Hey, girls. We have to text Dan to tell him to come over," Owen reminded them.

They cheered up immediately. They blinked eagerly, their eyelashes still wet with tears.

"Do it. Text him," Connie urged him.

"Dan, the man!" Maggie said.

The girls jumped down from his arms and watched him texting. He showed them Dan's reply, and Connie read it out loud for Maggie. "On my way." Short and to the point, it made all three of them smile.

Chapter 2

Before she left, Mom had hidden presents for the girls in their room. Once they got home, Owen told them about the presents, and they went on a treasure hunt. They were going to turn that room upside down. It was good of his mom to think of giving them something to do. Owen hoped the search would keep the girls occupied until Dan arrived.

Though he was afraid he might seem too eager, Owen stayed by the front window and kept an eye out for Dan. He opened the front door before Dan had a chance to ring the bell. He wanted to talk to him before the girls swarmed him and started vying for his attention.

Dan came in with only a backpack over his shoulder.

"Is the rest of your stuff in the car?" Owen asked like he couldn't wait for him to move in.

"I figured this is all I need for the next two days," Dan said.

"Optimistic, aren't you?"

"I just don't want to get ahead of myself. How did it go at the airport?" Dan asked, setting his bag down.

"Not too bad. The girls were sad. Mom held it together, so that helped a lot. It's not easy for her to leave them. She hid some gifts in their room. They're searching for them. That's why you're not fending them off right now."

"So what am I going to be doing?" Dan wanted to know.

"Usually you'll just keep the girls on track, getting ready for school, doing homework, supervising them mostly. Help with light housekeeping, meals, the girls' laundry. Don't pick up after the girls though. But do pick them up from school. I know you have your own car, but when you're driving the girls, use the grandma mobile, Mom's Lexus. It's all set up for them."

Hearing his long term duties outlined like that, Dan looked surprised. "You make it sound like I'm already hired."

"Unless you light up a joint right in front of me, you are pretty much hired," Owen told him. He wasn't going to pretend he was still making up his mind.

"That's good to know. So what can I do today?"

"Just hang out with the girls, get to know them. Today and tomorrow, let's just keep them distracted, keep them busy," Owen said. "You were already a big help. Just mentioning your name cheered them up after they saw Mom off."

Dan smiled. They both stood there uncertainly for a moment. Other than grabbing Dan and kissing him, Owen couldn't think of anything else to do.

"You can take your bag up and see what they're up to," he said to Dan. "The spare room is all yours. I have to handle some stuff." Owen pointed to his office. "Be strong. Don't let the girls get the better of you."

Dan saluted him and went up the stairs two at a time. Owen watched him go then kicked himself for it. If he didn't keep himself in check, he was going to come off as a sleazy uncle.

*

When Dan went to the girls' room, they were unwrapping two small gift boxes tied with oversized pink ribbons. They showed him two silver chains with lockets shaped like teddy bears. Each one was inscribed with the girls' names and the words "Grandma loves you". Inside was a picture of each one of them with Kate. Dan helped them put on the necklaces. After he was done admiring them, the girls showed him every single toy in their room.

There was a built in shelf where dolls and teddy bears were lined up. Girls' own artwork was tacked up on a corkboard above that. The girls' beds had ice cream themed covers and pillows in the shape of apples, strawberries and orange slices. In one corner, Dan saw a wooden doll house with a roof covered in pink paint and glitter. By the time the girls told him all about every adorable toy they owned, he was dizzy from a girl toy overload. The sound of Owen's footsteps on the stairs promised some relief.

Dan expected Owen to be looking over his shoulder more while he was with the girls, but Owen had given him plenty of time before he came up. Dan came out to meet him. He leaned his elbows on the railing as he waited and enjoyed the sight of Owen. Dan's gaze traveled up Owen's long-limbed body and over his broad shoulders. He could kiss those shoulders then down his arms to his fingertips. Admiring Owen's strong hands with long fingers as they gripped the railing, Dan wanted those hands on his body. Those fingers would look great wrapped around his cock. Just as that thought became vivid in Dan's mind, his eyes met Owen's. Dan held his breath. Owen's dark eyes always looked like he was holding back a smile. Dan had forgotten that about him. He did remember that every time he saw Owen, no matter how briefly, he wanted to get close to him. The age gap made that impossible when Dan was still a teenager. Now here he was, staying in the same house with him. Too bad there were other reasons why Owen was out of reach.

"I see you are in one piece," Owen said as he stopped in front of Dan. "Have they introduced you to all their dolls and all their teddy bears?" His

pleasantly deep voice tickled Dan like someone running a hand down his spine.

"I think so," Dan said. "I hope I'm not expected to memorize all their names and all their life stories."

"Not only that, you have to kiss them goodnight too. I've kissed so many dolls," Owen lamented.

"I'm not kissing dolls," Dan vowed.

"No one is going to give you a choice. Maggie is just going to hold up some mop of hair in a pink dress, and she's not going to give up till you smooch the thing."

"Who are you? Stephen King?"

"Make no mistake, we're living a horror movie with those two."

"What are you talking about," Connie asked as she and Maggie came out of their room. They both looked from Owen to Dan suspiciously.

"How scary you are," Owen told them straight out.

"Uncle Owen is afraid of girls," Connie said to Dan.

"Just you two," Owen told her as the girls pulled both of them into their room.

"Now I'm going to be covered in glitter," Owen said as they went in. "We buy it by the gallons."

Maggie tried to make them sit on the colorful carpet between their beds.

"This is our magic carpet," Maggie said of the rug with butterflies and ladybugs on it.

"Does it fly?" Dan asked.

"No," Maggie said, shaking her head at Dan like she thought he was crazy.

"What does it do?" Dan asked.

"It's magic," she said and frowned at him for not getting it the first time. She then saw that Connie was poking around inside the dollhouse in the corner.

"I'm redecorating," Connie said.

"No redecorating!" Maggie yelled.

"Girls!" Owen warned them. Then he turned to Dan with a smile. "That's right. This is your job now."

"I'm supposed to referee disputes over tiny furniture?"

"That's up to you. Just don't wait for the hair-pulling to start," Owen told him.

"They don't do that?" Dan said.

"Not much," Owen said and left him at the girls' mercy.

Dan caught up on some texts while the girls played. They got restless around dinner time so Dan went to see if he needed to do anything about making dinner. He figured the more useful he was, the more likely Owen was to keep him around.

He found Owen in his office, busy and oblivious to him. Dan enjoyed the sight of his broad shoulders and the deft movements of his long fingers over the keyboard. He also took a second or two to check out his office. The space was modern and well organized but showing signs of Owen's busy work life even at home. Crowded with papers but still orderly, Owen's desk faced two windows that let in plenty of light. With soft gray and white as the dominant colors and touches of orange and bright red, the place was cheerful and energetic.

"I was thinking of taking the girls out for dinner. You up for that?" Owen said when Dan got his attention with his question about dinner.

"Is distraction on the menu?"

"It is. I hate to see them sad. I think a dinner at home might remind them that Mom is gone," Owen said.

"They were peering into your mom's room just now," Dan said then he had an idea. "I know, let's go to The Blue Tulip. They're having a pie throwing and pie eating contest at six."

"That's a college hangout," Owen said with distaste.

"So? I took my brother, Jason. He loved it. You don't think the girls will enjoy seeing some college kids get a face-full of pie?"

"They will," Owen admitted. "I don't know about me."

"Too lowbrow for you? Are you too sophisticated and mature to enjoy that kind of thing?"

"You think you can get me to do anything just by implying I'm stuffy and old. I'm twenty-eight. That crap doesn't work on me yet. Give it a few years," Owen told him archly.

"I have more strenuous methods of persuasion when I get serious," Dan threatened.

Owen backed down immediately. "Fine. Let's go watch college kids make fools of themselves."

"That's the spirit."

The Blue Tulip Café had the look of a European café but the atmosphere of a nerdy, hipster hangout. Whole tables full of them were arguing loudly so you couldn't hear even a hint of the indie track playing in the background. Dan could tell that Owen felt out of place, but the girls stared around with big smiles on their faces.

"There are lots of big kids here," Connie said.

Dan was about to object since these were people his own age when he saw Owen laughing. Dan decided not to give him even more ammunition by protesting too much.

"Pies!" Maggie pointed at the area in the back where they were lining up the pies. Plastic sheets were on the floor and hung over the back wall.

They managed to get a table with a good view. That's when Dan saw a table full of familiar faces even closer to the action. Everyone sitting over there in the splatter zone was waving at him.

Owen noticed them, and said, "Are they your friends? You can go and sit with them if you want."

"I dance with the one that brung me," Dan said. "I'll just go and say hi to them."

"You better come back," Connie said to him.

"You better," Maggie echoed.

When Dan got to their table, his friends were all looking past him and eyeing Owen.

"So that's your new job?" Dahlia said, arching an eyebrow. "I like what I see, minus the kids, of course."

"They're sweet girls," Dan said.

"So you like the whole package," Stella said suggestively.

"I didn't say that," Dan lied.

"But you did bring him here to show him off," Paul pointed out.

"You're already parading him around? You are shameless." Clay shook his head with fake disapproval and maybe a hint of jealousy.

"I'm not," Dan said though he knew he was fighting a losing battle.

"You're flaunting that six feet of gorgeous. You're rubbing our noses in it," Paul said.

"Not mine," Gary said. "All I see is something blocking my view of that cute freshman with perfect boobs."

"Gary, we know you're straight. You don't need to mention boobs every time you open your mouth," Clay told him.

Gary was often the only straight guy in the group of girls and gay guys.

"Considering that I think about boobs every single second, I'm not really mentioning them that much," Gary said.

"I'll leave you guys to your intellectually stimulating conversation," Dan told them.

"Ask your guy to shift over," Gary said to him as he left.

When Dan got back, the girls were thrilled. Owen was more subtle, but he

wasn't displeased to have Dan rejoin them. Once he sat down, Dan leaned in to whisper in his ear. "Move your chair. My straight friend wants to eyefuck a freshman. You're blocking his view."

"Straight? You want me to facilitate a heterosexual transaction?" Owen asked, not bothering to whisper since every word was incomprehensible to the girls.

With a look of disdain, Owen moved over. That put his chair closer to Dan's. Gary was a better friend than he knew.

Once the pie action started, the girls watched so closely and laughed so much, Dan and Owen had to remind them to eat. Owen wasn't too interested though. He spent most of his time looking at his phone. Seeing him texting so much, Dan jealously wondered if Owen was seeing someone. As if on cue, Owen put away his phone.

"Sorry. A client was having trouble filling something out. They're allowed to duck?" Owen asked about the pie throwing. He had been busy on his phone when they explained the rules. As he spoke, he leaned close to Dan to be heard over the cheering and jeering.

Dan swallowed. He wanted to lean into him, get more of his body heat and that enticing scent, but he kept his cool as he answered, telling Owen about the rules. Dan had a feeling that Owen didn't care about the rules. He wanted to stay close to Dan. Just as Dan was hoping that wasn't just his imagination, he caught Stella giving him a thumbs up.

By the time they went home, it was almost the girls' bedtime. They all went upstairs together, and Owen gave Dan credit for his idea.

"They were thoroughly distracted, I'll give you that. And we're not buying any pies for a while."

Dan had grabbed a few more things from his car and took them to his room. The room had style but not so much that Dan couldn't make himself at home. The ceiling was high, going right up to the slanting roof beams. He went to check out the view from the window of his new bedroom. He saw mostly rooftops and trees dark against a moonlit sky. Some high-rises were lit up in the distance. Turning he saw that Owen was joining him.

"It's not a bad view, but it's better in the daytime," Owen said.

"I like it," Dan agreed, but his eyes were on Owen not the view out the window.

Maggie came in and looked around the room critically.

"This is your room? You'll get lonely if you sleep here," Maggie said then she ran off.

"That's the baby room," Connie told him as she poked her head in.

"It is?" Dan saw no sign of that. It just looked like a guest room.

Owen told him what Connie was talking about. "It was Maggie's. She had her own room for about half a second. That's why Mom and I got this house, so everyone would get their own room. But every morning Mom and I found Maggie asleep in Connie's bed. So we moved her in there with Connie."

"That's sweet," Dan said, but Owen disagreed.

"Sweet? Do you know how many territorial disputes we have to break up?"

Dan only laughed. Maggie came into the room carrying a brown bear with a yellow bow tie. She looked down at the stuffed toy gravely then handed it to Dan with a frown on her face.

"This is Mr. Butterscotch Bear. He'll stay with you so you don't get lonely," she told him.

"Won't you miss him?" Dan said.

"Yeah, but I have a bunch and you don't have any."

"OK. I'll just borrow him until I get one of my own," Dan said and looked over at Owen, who tried to figure out the reason.

"You want me to buy you a stuffed toy?" Owen asked as a confused look crossed his face.

"Try again," Dan told him.

"Maybe he wants a dinosaur. Boys like dinosaurs," Connie said.

"Dinosaur it is," Owen said. He obviously didn't want to address what else Dan's look might have meant. Dan decided to take that as a gentle rebuff.

Chapter 3

Sunday morning Dan joined Owen at the kitchen table so they could plan their day. They each had a cup of coffee but nothing else.

"Let's drive to Orchardville," Dan suggested right off.

"What's over there other than a jam factory?" Owen wanted to know.

"Glen Meadows. It's a retirement home. I was hoping I could stop by and see my great-grandmother."

"Didn't you just visit her with your brother when we had the wedding?" Owen asked.

"I did, but she wasn't feeling well. I like to go and see her as often as I can. She doesn't get many visitors. Her kids are both dead. My dad never visits. My aunt visits once a year."

"That's nice of you. What else is over there that the girls might like?"

"There are some antique stores and good places to eat. Oh, and there's this place called Beesley Gardens. You pay a fee and go in to look at all kinds of flowers. I took my great-grandma a few times when she felt up to it. They have a tearoom too."

"Oh, yeah. That's the thing," Owen said. He didn't like what he heard, but he knew the girls would. "We have a plan, but first, a big breakfast at Lupe's. It's a waffle house down the street."

"I wanted to show off my pancake flipping skills," Dan said.

"Another time. I'll look forward to it," Owen told him but tried not to dwell on how much he looked forward to all the time he was going to spend with Dan.

When he was telling the girls the plan for the day, Owen said to them, "This is going to be a picture-taking trip. So get your cameras, and we'll take lots of pictures and send them to Grandma. And make sure you wear your teddy bear necklaces."

He knew his mom must miss the girls terribly. It would be good for her to see the girls having fun. He was going to shoot some video too, but Kostas warned him that they wouldn't have access to a good internet connection that often so Owen focused on photos.

The breakfast was more whipped cream than waffles for the girls. Afterward, they all piled into Owen's gray Subaru Outback and took a nice drive. The car was filled with the girls' singing, giggling, and squabbling. First, they stopped by the retirement home. There wasn't much of a chance that Dan's great-grandmother would be able to go to Beesley Gardens with

them, but Dan still wanted to invite her.

A low, white building with lattice windows, Glen Meadows looked good from the outside and the grounds were very nice. Owen decided that he and the girls would walk around while they waited for Dan to see his great-grandmother. When Dan started to leave, the girls were not happy.

"Is he going without us?" Connie asked, alarmed.

"We want to visit the great-grandma too," Maggie said.

Owen looked at Dan for the decision.

"I think she'd like that. My great-grandma likes to sit with me in that little park." Dan pointed to a copse of trees with some benches under them and a small fountain in the center. "You guys can wait over there, and I'll bring her out if she feels up to it."

The spot by the fountain was shaded and serene. Connie walked alongside Owen while Maggie ran circles around the tiered fountain.

"Is a great-grandma better than a grandma?" Connie asked Owen. She was worried that Dan had won some kind of grandma competition.

"No. No one is better than your grandma," Owen assured her.

"Right," Connie agreed and smiled, happy to hear it.

Dan and his great-grandmother came toward them slowly. His great-grandmother wore a pink track suit and walked with the help of a walker. Her pink outfit and her white puff of hair endeared her to the girls immediately. They peered at her with smiles on their faces.

"She's pretty great," Connie said like she had decided that she was worthy of the name great-grandma.

The old lady turned to Dan and said, "I told you to get yourself a nice young man, and you went and got yourself a whole family." Her voice was croaky and a little breathless. Dan helped her to sit down on one of the benches. "And who is this young man with such pretty daughters?" she asked.

"We're not daughters. We're nieces," Connie said.

"That's our Uncle Owen," Maggie said.

Dan took over the introductions at that point. The girls approved of her name, Dolores. They chattered to her non-stop telling her about their grandmother, and she told them what to keep an eye out for at Beesley Gardens. After the girls took pictures of her, Dan walked her back, and the four of them went on to see some flowers and drink tea. Owen sighed at the prospect, but the girls were beyond excited.

Beesley Gardens had walkways that curved among the flowering plants. Ornate benches were found along the way. Some of them were framed by

archways covered with flowering vines. The girls jumped up and down with excitement at seeing so many flowers. With autumn around the corner, there were more blooms in the two long greenhouses. To Owen, it was just a pleasant stroll, but the girls exclaimed over everything and took a million pictures. As the girls ran back and forth, Owen talked to Dan about his great-grandmother.

"She accepts you being gay. That's nice considering her age."

"After I come all this way to see her, she better," Dan said. "And anyway, she's totally doing it with this other old lady named Millicent."

"Even though she can barely walk?"

"What's walking got to do with it?"

"If you make me picture any of this..." Owen started to warn him.

"Got it," Dan said in perfect agreement.

As he and Dan walked, the girls ran ahead then back to them to make them look at different flowers. Owen made sure that they took pictures of each other, not just flowers, and he took some of them together. Every time he took a picture of Dan, he felt guilty. He was only taking so many pictures of Dan so Mom could see him with the girls, but he knew he was going to be looking at Dan in those pictures too often and too long.

Even now his gaze got stuck to some detail of Dan – his eyes, his mouth always ready to smile, his fingers as they brushed a leaf or a flower petal. To get his mind off Dan's physical presence and undeniable beauty, he thought about how well Dan was doing with the girls. They liked him, and he didn't let them walk all over him, which was a miracle.

"I half expected you to run screaming into the street once you had a taste of dealing with Connie and Maggie," Owen said, kind of impressed by his fortitude.

"Does that mean I don't need to look for another place to live?" Dan asked.

"No, you're officially hired. Tomorrow is Labor Day. I wasn't going to go to the office, but a sale fell through so we're back at square one. You'll have the girls all to yourself."

"I don't have classes. That works out great," Dan said.

"It does. I thought I might have to switch to working from home more after Mom was gone, but I can't show houses from there. It will be good to go out and earn some commissions. And it will free up Yolanda to do more selling too."

"Who was going to watch the girls before I came along?" Dan wondered.

"I would have hired someone eventually. Until then I had a plan in place for when I had to go in to work. Mrs. Luden was going to be taking care of

the girls. She lives down the street. She's really nice, and they know her well, but she's old and those two wear her out."

"We're tough on her old bones," Connie quoted. She had just sneaked up on them from behind a big, sweet smelling bush with yellow flowers.

"Yes, you are," Owen agreed. "Mrs. Luden will be glad to hear that she's off the hook." He turned back to Dan. "I'll give you her information in case you ever need to drop them off with her."

"It's good to have a backup," Dan said.

"You'll be spending the day with Dan tomorrow," Owen informed Connie. Maggie was preoccupied, peering at a small shrub that had lost all its leaves but still had flowers. She looked very puzzled.

"We can go to the mall and have ice cream with sprinkles," Connie declared.

"You are not in charge. You will do what Dan tells you. Right?" Owen said, waiting for her to acknowledge his order.

Connie looked from Owen to Dan.

"You better," Dan told her. His voice was just stern enough to let her know he was serious.

Connie drew back a little.

"OK," she said, and Dan gave her a smile as she left.

"She's planning a mutiny. We'll both find ourselves locked in the hold," Owen predicted.

"I will not let that happen, Captain," Dan mocked him.

"I will find you tied to a chair when I come home," Owen said.

"Whoa. Are we talking about a completely different thing now?" Dan asked.

"No. We are still talking about your sad fate if you underestimate those girls," Owen said, determined not to be rattled by what Dan was implying.

Dan laughed at his dramatics. "I promise to be careful. Seriously, don't worry," Dan reassured him. He wasn't kidding around now. He could tell that Owen was anxious about tomorrow even if he did try to hide it. "If you want, I can call you on the hour every hour," Dan offered.

"Texts would be fine," Owen told him sheepishly.

"You're just being a good uncle," Dan told him with complete understanding.

Owen groaned inwardly. Already he knew he was going to get addicted to Dan, his looks, his smiles, his voice, his good nature. Dan's hand on the back of his arm gave him goose-bumps. Good thing he got a branch in the face when he turned without looking. It snapped him right out of it.

After Beesley Gardens, they hit some antique stores and had a messy dinner of ribs at a barbeque place with a great view of the orchards and strawberry fields. The girls had exhausted themselves on their daylong outing to Orchardville. It was no trouble getting them to go to bed that night.

After they were in bed, Owen went to his office with Dan, going over contact information and what to do in emergencies. When they were done, Dan still hung around as Owen sorted through the photos they all took and started uploading them. Half the time he was looking at some colorful blur and shaking his head. He could hear the girls' excited giggles and exclamations as each new flower came into view and they ran to get a closer look and take a bad photo.

"I see you smiling over there," Dan said.

"There are like three good pictures here," Owen grumbled.

"When they are happy, you're happy," Dan pronounced. "It's as simple as that."

"Stop seeing right through me," Owen said.

"Stop being transparent."

Owen did feel transparent when he was with Dan. There was no wall there like with most people. He felt like Dan understood him without any effort. Considering that they were only acquaintances until now, Owen had to wonder if he was only imagining a connection because he wanted one so badly. But even if a relationship wasn't going to happen, maybe they could be friends. Their mothers had been inseparable once. Owen's mom had just started in real estate and Dan's mom was the receptionist when they met. They used to go out all the time until Dan's mom got married last year and then moved away across the country. Thinking of that, Owen offered Dan some of the photos of him to send to his mom and his brother.

"Are you sending Kate too many pictures of me," Dan said as he looked over Owen's shoulder.

"She likes you, in case you haven't noticed," Owen told him.

"Your mom was always good to us," Dan said. "She found that house for us after my dad left, and we couldn't afford the mortgage on the old house. And she helped Mom find a better job. My mom wasn't as outgoing as Kate. Your mom encouraged her to go out and have fun after my dad left. Kate brought her back to life."

"Does that mean my mom is to blame for your mom meeting her new husband?" Owen asked.

"No. They met at the farmers' market while picking out cantaloupes," Dan said with a disgusted look on his face.

"And you've hated cantaloupes ever since," Owen guessed.

"All fruit. He is so uptight," Dan said with a sigh.

"My mom's new husband is definitely not uptight. If you put a gun to my head, I'll even admit he's a nice guy, and he makes Mom so happy."

"My mom seems pretty happy too, and Jason gets along with him so that's good. But I miss how it used to be. I mean, I want my mom to be happy, but it was nice when it was just the three of us."

"I know what you mean. Me and the girls will try to keep you distracted," Owen said but then thought it sounded kind of funny. "I mean the girls will."

"Don't try to slack off. You need to do your part too." Dan told him with a smile that shone out of his eyes and made Owen feel warm inside and tingly all over. If Dan only knew what he was doing to him.

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After Owen was done sending the photos to Kate, they moved into the living room. Dan looked at some framed family photos along the way. Connie and Maggie's parents were in many of them. Their photos were often taken on exotic vacations. Dan remembered hearing that they were serious travelers. "They didn't live long enough, but they did live," his mother had said. Dan looked at a photo of the girls and saw their parents in them.

"Connie looks kind of like you and your brother, and Maggie is like her mother," Dan said. He was comparing the girls to the family photos of the Wakefield brothers as gangly, teenaged boys with their arms over each other's shoulders, and Owen's sister-in-law looking elegant and lovely on her wedding day.

"Maggie looks so much like her. Laura, her mother, was my best friend. She was so smart and had it together. I never thought she would go for a goofball like Mike. It never occurred to me to set them up. They knew each other for a while, and then one day Mike asked her out. I was getting ready to console him as he got shot down, kindly but firmly. But Laura smiled and said yes. I was floored. Mike was floored too." Owen stared off into the distance, seeing that fateful moment and smiling. His look slowly turned sad.

Now Dan understood what a monumental loss this was to him. To lose his brother was unthinkable, but Owen lost both his brother and his best friend. Dan had seen Mike less than Owen, or maybe he had just noticed him less. He was lanky and not as good-looking as Owen. Dan had gone to

his and his wife's funeral with his mother. He remembered how cold it was that day and how pale Owen and his mom looked as they clung to each other like two drowning people.

"I heard they died in an avalanche," Dan said.

"They were on a ski weekend with friends. Mike and Laura went off where they weren't supposed to go. The beaten path was never good enough for them. Mike was the crazy, inept, adventurous brother. He loved trying new things, eating weird food, getting food poisoning. He was voted most likely to be eaten by a bear. You'd think no one ever told him he was a geek and not built for adventure, but I told him every chance I got. It was my job as his annoying little brother." Seeing Dan's look, he had to add, "I know I'm a geek too. But he was a megageek – comic books, action figures, comic cons, the whole deal. I keep it on the down low."

"If you say so," Dan said. "He sounds like he was fun."

"He was a fun big brother," Owen agreed. "What's your little brother like?"

"A baseball fanatic right now," Dan said with a grin as he thought about Jason's breathless enthusiasm about the game. "When he starts talking running averages and curve balls, my eyes just glaze over. That's when he punches me in the arm. I almost miss that. I told him, 'Dude, you know I'm gay. I can appreciate sports on only one level.'"

"We're on the same page there. Want to watch a game?" Owen offered jokingly.

"I was thinking locker room porn."

"I don't think we know each other well enough to be watching porn together."

"You have a three date rule for that or something?" Dan asked. He kind of liked where this conversation ended up.

"We were having a perfectly wholesome conversation a minute ago," Owen said.

"Hey, I'm responsible for only half the sexual tension in this room," Dan told him though he was ready to pin all of it on Owen.

"I don't generate sexual tension. I generate boredom," Owen claimed.

"With that body?" Dan looked him up and down, but Owen just shook his head like what Dan said was a joke.

That night, Dan went to bed happy even if he couldn't sleep. What a major change from his last job. Parking cars hadn't been so bad at first. Now and then, he got to drive some seriously cool cars, for a few minutes at least. He got to work with his friend Antonio, and most of the other guys

there were OK. Too bad Keith had to ruin things for him.

When he quit that job, Dan couldn't have pictured where he would end up and what he would be doing for a living. Though, honestly, so far this didn't seem like work. It probably would once he had to take care of the girls by himself.

The thing that he couldn't wrap his mind around was Owen. He was living with and working for the guy he had fantasized about through most of his high school years. Was he lucky or what? Or what. He stood as much of a chance with Owen as he did when he was still a teenager. So far he had rebuffed or ignored every hint that Dan was interested in him. Being around him was going to be hell.

Even now Dan was torturing himself with images of Owen stripping down for bed. He had gotten a glimpse of Owen's bedroom. It was more minimalist and modern than the rest of the house, but it wasn't stark. Dark colors and severe lines were mixed with plush fabrics and soft colors. That's where Dan pictured Owen as he took off his clothes next to that big bed. Since this wasn't the real, reserved Owen, why the hell shouldn't he sleep naked?

"That's right, strip all the way for me," Dan said. Closing his eyes, Dan moved his hand down his chest to his abs and then under the waistband of his pajama bottoms. Gripping his cock, he said Owen's name. Owen turned, stiff and ready to please.

"Make me come hard so I never stop dreaming about you," Dan said. As he stroked himself, he pictured Owen naked, leaning over him, ass high in the air, sucking him, moaning as his head bobbed. Then right after he came and started to fall asleep, Dan pictured the real Owen. Owen's dark eyes turned from sad to almost happy. His mouth was on the verge of a smile. The lips parted and Dan heard Owen's voice saying his name.

Chapter 4

The next morning was a little disorienting for Dan. Not just because this was only his second day in a new house, but also because he had been so intimate with Owen all night long. They kissed, they fucked. They even fucked on the beach. Then the beach turned into a giant terrarium, and people were watching them. Some obnoxious idiot even tapped on the glass. That was kind of weird as was looking at the real Owen, who knew nothing about any of this crazy stuff. Nope, the real Owen was all business as he told Dan what to do.

"There were a few things I was going to do today, now the honor of picking up my dry-cleaning goes to you," Owen said, producing his ticket.

"No problem."

"And I was going to do some shopping." Owen handed him a shopping list. "The pork is tonight's dinner. Put the other meat in the freezer."

"OK."

Owen smiled at him for some reason. He got some cash out of a box that was sitting on the kitchen counter and handed it to him.

"I think that will cover it. The girls will ask for everything, buy them nothing," Owen said sternly then he softened his stance. "You can buy them a treat, but don't overdo it."

"I think I can handle that," Dan said.

"We'll see. You might find that taking care of two girls is a little different from taking care of your brother."

"I know. I already got some glitter on me," Dan showed him his arm.

"They branded you. It's all over for you now."

"You're scaring me, man."

"Good. That fear is what's going to keep you alive. Don't turn your back on them." Those were Owen's parting words of advice.

After breakfast, Owen went to work, and Dan felt like he could finally breathe. The sexual tension was going to kill him. To help pass the time, Dan decided he and the girls should walk to the drycleaners and to the store.

Owen's neighborhood was really nice. The houses were all different. Some were pretty cool. And the girls pointed out all sorts of things to him, from a mailbox in the shape of a cat to weird lawn ornaments and the house of their babysitter, Mrs. Luden. Then they saw a woman leading two big, white dogs. She was across the street and going in the opposite direction. The girls squealed and pulled on his arms like he was supposed to chase

down the woman and kidnap her dogs. It turned out they just wanted to follow them.

"See the plastic bags that woman is carrying," Dan told them. "What do you think she's going to do with them? We don't want to see that."

The girls just looked confused. Dan took advantage of that and led them away.

The drycleaners was their first stop. With the girls hanging on his arms, Dan was barely able to hand over the ticket to the girl behind the counter. She had multiple piercings, and Maggie reassured Dan, "Don't worry. They don't hurt."

"He's our manny. We're going everywhere with him," Connie announced to the girl when she came back.

She looked at Dan with compassion. When he tried to reach for the dry-cleaning, Dan found both girls still hanging onto his hands.

"It's like you're handcuffed," the girl behind the counter told him.

"One of you needs to let go," Dan told the girls.

Neither one did.

"Connie, you let go this time."

As she let go reluctantly, Connie made a jealous face at Maggie.

"Good luck," the girl with the piercings told him as he left.

As he slung Owen's dry-cleaning over his shoulder, Dan didn't know how he was going to get out of the supermarket alive with these two. He texted Owen. "Going shopping. If I don't make it back, tell my mom I was heroic to the end."

"My brave soldier," Owen texted back.

Dan smiled, making too much of that first word. "I want to be your everything," Dan wanted to tell him. He was hopeless, ready to wallow in his infatuation, feed the flames with offhanded comments. The girls wouldn't allow that though. In front of the store, they each tried to grab their own carts after Dan already got one. Maggie almost ran over his foot with hers. Then they tried to convince him that flowers and helium balloons were on the shopping list and to buy cupcakes instead of bread. Of course they were constantly sneaking things into the cart. If he didn't stop obsessing about Owen and stay sharp, they were going to eat him alive.

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Owen wondered how Dan was doing, but he found that he wasn't as worried as he thought he would be. That meant he trusted Dan. He wasn't sure he trusted the girls though. He still looked forward to going home to

them. Unfortunately he was also looking forward to going home to be with Dan. Damn, this was such a deceptive arrangement. Already, it was too much like really living with someone and raising two kids together. It was a sweet trap, and Owen was falling headfirst into it.

Before he headed home, Owen made a quick stop at Eve's Accessories at the mall. Eve was a friend, but her merchandise hurt his eyes. The best way to describe the place would be to say that Connie and Maggie loved it. Eve's sold costume jewelry, hair accessories and assorted trinkets. Owen tried not to get any on him as he parked himself at her counter. All weekend he had avoided calling her or texting her with the news. Now he was delivering it in person.

"It turns out that before she ditched me, Mom hired a manny. She pretended I had final say, but it was a done deal by the time I knew anything about it."

"And?" Eve's pretty black eyes were expectant as she adjusted the single comb that held up her long, silky hair.

"That's not newsworthy enough for you?" Owen said.

"I'm waiting for a description," she told him as she gave a quick wave and a smile to a regular customer. She looked back at Owen.

Owen stared at her without saying one word about how young and hot Dan was.

"I see," Eve said like she was reading his mind.

"His hotness is irrelevant," Owen lied.

"Sure it is. Can we trade moms? Yours gets you a hot manny. Mine won't even bake me cookies."

"I'll trade you. When can she come over to babysit?" Owen said to her. That was a total bluff. He wouldn't trade Dan for anyone.

"You could still send him packing?" Eve baited him.

"No, I can't. He would be homeless and jobless if I did. I'm boxed in."

"Are you saying he's a live-in?" Eve said, her eyes widening.

"Yes," Owen said, knowing she would make too much of that.

"So there is a hot guy living with you. Are you sure your mother didn't hire you a boyfriend?" Eve asked, squinting at him.

"I'm not that pathetic. Even if my mom does have more of a sex life than I do," Owen said with a sigh.

"Ninety year old nuns have more of a sex life than you do."

"Why do they have to be ninety years old? And I'm busy. Especially now that Mom left me in the lurch," Owen complained.

"You certainly do have your hands full with that manny to keep you busy day and night."

"I was looking for sympathy not innuendo," Owen told her.

"Telling me that there is a hot manny living with you is not a good way to get my sympathy. Lose a limb or something."

"Ouch," Owen said. Then he went to buy Dan a stuffed toy.

When Owen arrived home, Dan met him at the door but the girls didn't. Owen knew what that meant, but Dan was confused.

"Why are they hiding?" he whispered.

"They're going to jump out and scare me. They did it once around Halloween, and it was such a big hit now it's a recurring thing. Sometimes they run to hug me. Sometimes they jump out to scare me."

As he waited, Owen could clearly hear Connie and Maggie arguing behind the couch.

"They are terrible at this," he said to Dan. Then he addressed the girls loudly enough to be heard over their arguing. "You're supposed to jump out and scare me. Where are you?"

"We'll be right there!" Connie yelled.

"See what I mean," he said to Dan.

When they finally ran out from behind the couch yelling "Boo!" Owen acted surprised and scared. Maggie giggled, and Connie grinned with satisfaction at a job well done.

Once they were gone, Owen turned to Dan. "All this time and they still stink at it," Owen said.

"Their job is to be cute, not scary," Dan said.

"I just want to see some progress."

They headed into the kitchen where the girls were busy with some kind of art project at the kitchen table. As Owen sorted through the mail at the counter, Dan handed him receipts.

"The receipts and change. I hung up the dry-cleaning on your closet door."

"I assume your resignation is written on the back of one of these," Owen said as he held up the receipts.

"It wasn't that bad," Dan said with a lopsided grin.

"Now say it with a straight face," Owen challenged him.

Dan only laughed.

"Thanks for doing all this," Owen said. He barely glanced at the receipts before shoving them in a drawer with others and stuffing the change back in the cash box.

"I would have bet that you were the kind to check over the receipts and count the change. You're not worried that I'm ripping you off?" Dan said.

"That's not the nicest thing anyone ever said about me," Owen said, feeling a little insulted. "If I didn't trust you with a few bucks, I wouldn't let you near the girls."

"Good point."

Maggie came over to show Owen a drawing that was ninety percent glitter. The kitchen table was ninety percent glitter too.

"What did you guys do today?" Owen asked her.

"Everything!" Maggie said. She pointed to one particular part of her drawing and smiled expectantly at Owen.

He didn't have a clue what he was supposed to see there, but he nodded and said, "That's very good."

That satisfied her and she went to tell Connie that her drawing was a hit. Owen remembered what he had for Dan and got it out of his laptop bag.

"Catch," Owen said and threw it at him.

"Oh, my God. My stuffed dinosaur," Dan exclaimed looking from the green dinosaur to Owen.

Owen shrugged.

"Thanks," Dan said with a big grin. He showed it to Maggie and took it up so he could return Mr. Butterscotch Bear to her. She hugged the bear tightly like it had been kidnapped, not borrowed at her insistence. Both girls were happy to see that Dan had a stuffed toy of his own to keep him company.

"Why aren't they worried that I'll get lonely?" Owen wondered, seeing them make a fuss over Dan.

"Are you saying...?" Dan started to imply something too personal for Owen's liking.

"I'm not saying anything," Owen interrupted him defensively.

"Want to borrow my dinosaur?" Dan offered.

"I think I'll have a beer," Owen said. When he opened the fridge Dan reached in too. "No beer for you," Owen said. The girls raised their heads since that was the kind of thing he usually said to them, though not about beer.

"I was reaching for a bottle of water," Dan claimed.

"Riiight."

"I don't need a beer, but I wouldn't mind seeing what you are like when you have a few and loosen up," Dan said as Owen got out the pork chops for dinner as well.

"One beer won't do that," Owen told him.

"What would work better, a six pack or a bottle of champagne?" Dan asked.

Owen turned to look at him, but after a quick smile, Dan looked away. He seemed kind of quiet as he helped with making dinner. Owen wondered what was on his mind, but he had a feeling that he shouldn't ask.

Whenever Dan said something flirty, Owen pulled away. His sense of self-preservation told him not to go there. Dan was so good-looking, it was indecent. Even worse, he had a personality that made Owen feel all warm inside. Spending time with him only made Dan look better in his eyes. Unfortunately, Owen knew he wasn't working the same kind of magic on Dan. They might get along and kid around, but Dan could never want him. Owen felt a stab of pain at the thought. Where did that come from? He couldn't be that far gone already.

Chapter 5

They established a routine that fit Dan's schedule like he had made it with this job in mind. Owen was glad about that and also that Dan didn't have any trouble fitting in his studying while helping with the girls.

Eve was the first of Owen's friends to meet Dan. She told Owen that she was out of sympathy for him forever. Justin congratulated Owen like he was about to get married. Jacinto called him a dirty, dirty dog. His other friends were similarly impressed though he tried to tell them nothing was going on.

Despite his claims, Owen did feel a few pangs of worry whenever Dan went out. Even though he was only going out with friends, Owen was afraid that Dan would hook up with someone, maybe even get serious. Owen shut down those stupid, jealous feelings as much as he could. And anyway, he saw no signs that Dan was involved with anyone. Owen pretended not to be incredibly relieved about that.

Everything was going smoothly except for one minor glitch. One day, Dan called from the college parking lot to say that his car had two flat tires and that he might not be home in time to pick up the girls. Owen told him not to worry and went to get them.

When he got home with the girls, Owen decided to call his mom. He let each of the girls talk to her then he got on the phone himself. First thing his mom wanted to know was how the girls were doing.

"They are missing you, but they're not letting it get them down. And Dan is a big help. He was a good choice, Mom. Is that what you wanted to hear?"

"It's exactly what I wanted to hear," she said then she got more serious. "Oh, God, I miss them so much."

"But you are having a good time?"

"The best. Make sure to keep my orchid alive," she reminded him.

"I'm watering it every day."

"You'll kill it!"

"I'm kidding, Mom. You typed up detailed instructions. I'm following them to the letter," Owen assured her before he put her on speaker to say a few last things to the girls.

"You girls say hi to my orchid for me," she told them.

After she hung up, Maggie ran to the office, where Owen kept the orchid.

"Grandma says 'Hiiii!'" Maggie yelled at the poor, flowerless thing.

"Why so loud?" Owen asked. "Orchids aren't hard of hearing."

"But Grandma is really far away," Maggie said.

For the sake of his sanity, Owen decided to give up trying to make sense of that.

Dan got home with new tires on his car, and he looked troubled. He wouldn't say why until the girls were out of the room.

"Is it the new tires? I'll pay for them," Owen offered, thinking that maybe that was the reason he looked grim.

"No. I got it covered. But the guy who looked at my tires said they were punctured on the side. That it couldn't be an accident," Dan told him.

"Do you think it was random vandalism or...?"

"Probably. I haven't made any enemies at school."

"Be careful," Owen urged him.

"I will," Dan promised.

The girls came in, looking annoyed at Dan.

"Why are you here?" Connie asked Dan. "Come play with us."

"Can't I talk to Dan for even one minute?" Owen asked.

"No," Connie said. "Dan doesn't have anything to do with you. He's our manny, not yours."

"Dan is our manny," Maggie echoed.

"I pay him," Owen told them.

"Give us money, and we'll pay him," Connie said.

"Give us lots of money. Write a big check," Maggie said.

"Come on. I'm taking my book bag up anyway," Dan told the girls. "You can make sure I do my homework."

*

Having to deal with the tires had taken up a big chunk of his time so Dan tried to get some stuff done for his classes. He let the girls hang out in his room while he studied. They poked around but didn't disturb him too much. When he was done and putting things away, Connie spotted the Batman and Robin PEZ dispensers on the armoire shelf where he kept his books.

"You have PEZ!" she exclaimed. "Give us PEZ."

"Give us PEZ, give us PEZ!" Maggie echoed. "Give it."

"They're empty," he told them and showed them.

They both whined with disappointment.

"I'll refill them," he promised them.

Turning to Connie, Maggie asked, "Are grown-ups allowed to have PEZ?"

"Dan is not a grown-up," Connie told her.

"I'm a grown-up," Dan told them both.

"Is he?" Maggie asked Connie, who shook her head.

"Why are you asking her?" Dan asked Maggie. "Who do you think is in charge? Connie?"

"Yes," Maggie said with no hesitation. "She's the big sister."

"Your big sister, not my big sister," Dan pointed out to her.

Maggie looked at Connie for the final decision.

"Dan is not a grown-up. He's a kid like us," Connie told Maggie.

"Stop brainwashing her. I am not a kid. I'm an adult," Dan said.

Connie looked up at him. "You have PEZ, and you play video games, and you have a book-bag, and you go to school, and you have homework just like us."

"I go to college. College isn't school," Dan claimed.

"You have a stuffed toy," Maggie piped up.

"You made me get it!"

"You're not allowed to drink and drive," Maggie said.

"No one is allowed to drink and drive."

"No beer for you!" Maggie repeated.

That's when Dan saw Owen laughing at him from the doorway. Dan just hoped that Owen didn't see him the same way the girls did. Since Owen was there to call the girls to dinner, they all went downstairs.

"College isn't school?" Owen said as they walked down.

"I have to defend myself by any means necessary. Facts be damned. This is about survival," Dan said.

Owen looked at him with approval for his no holds barred approach.

*

After the girls were in bed, Owen found Dan standing in the living room. He was looking out the bay window where the two of them sat and talked when he first came to the house. Owen came over and sat down on the window seat. He had his laptop with him, but he put it aside, unopened. He looked up at Dan expecting him to say something.

"I think this house is growing on me," Dan said and sat next to him, not too close. The laptop was between them.

"Why does it need to grow on you? It's a great house," Owen said defensively.

"At first I couldn't picture myself living here. But it seemed perfect for the girls."

"That's why Mom and I got it. Mom had an awesome apartment, but it wasn't kid-friendly or big enough especially once I moved in."

"It was good of you to move in with them."

"Actually I moved in for my own sanity," Owen told him.

"You moved in with your mom and the girls for your sanity?" Dan said in disbelief.

"I know. It was a different kind of crazy that drove me to it." Owen got serious. "After Mike and Laura died, I couldn't sleep at night. I was worrying about the girls and having nightmares. I would come by in the middle of the night to have a look at them to make sure they were OK. Then I would sleep over. I did that so much, Mom told me to just move in already. But I didn't just come over to look at them because I got scared and worried. I needed to look at the part of Mike and Laura that survived. Two of my favorite people came together and created these two amazing little girls. Connie and Maggie were so precious to me. That's why I was so afraid of losing them like I did their parents." Owen just stared for a moment. "I never imagined I could lose them both. If it wasn't for the girls..." he trailed off.

"It must have been so hard for them. The most important people in their lives gone," Dan said.

Owen knew the loss left a hole in their lives and in their hearts just like it did in his, except they were such little things. He didn't know how they could bear it.

"I remember Connie crying for her mom and dad. How could I possibly console her?" Owen said. Owen just held Connie and waited, told her he loved her. The children's grief had been so painful for both him and Mom. But they did their best to mend their little, broken hearts.

"You did fine," Dan said. "I know because of how well the girls are doing even though their grandmother went so far away."

"You had something to do with that too," Owen told him. "I couldn't have gotten them through this alone. When it comes to raising the girls, Mom did most of the heavy lifting. She cut back her work hours to be with them. She mostly just worked from here."

"Kate told me you offered to step in and take over for her at work so she could stay home with the girls," Dan said, trying to give him more credit than he deserved.

"I did what I could. Someone had to run things. I'm glad we got Yolanda now, or I would be stuck at the office all day." He frowned thoughtfully. "I guess Mom gave me an opportunity when she left. I'll be spending more time with the girls now. I'm actually looking forward to it."

"Any time you want them all to yourself, just say the word," Dan told him.

"Is that a threat?" Owen asked, panicking.

"I don't want to be in the way. Don't feel you always have to include me."

"You're my bodyguard. You are my human shield. I'm not going anywhere without you. They would make mincemeat of me," Owen exaggerated then he turned earnest. "But don't feel obligated to come with us if we go out somewhere that doesn't appeal to you. I know you have your own life."

"Now you're doing it," Dan said. "I like the girls. I have fun with them and even with you."

"I like how you added me in as an afterthought."

"I shouldn't say this to the guy who's paying me, but working here isn't really like work. I feel guilty getting paid for it on top of getting to live here and getting all my meals free."

"Call it hazard pay. Believe me, you earned it. I was just admitting to Mom today that she made the right choice. No one could fit in here better than you. And the girls glommed on to you the second they met you. Dan, the man."

"I'm glad we're all happy together."

"It's funny you said that," Owen said. "Before Mom's trip, I was worried this wouldn't be a happy house after she left. That I didn't have what it takes. Once you showed up, that thought never even occurred to me again. Don't underestimate what you've done for this family. We carry a lot of sadness inside us. We need you." He felt like he stared at Dan too long so he smiled and said, "No pressure."

"I don't feel any pressure. I'm happy I can be here for you guys. You know, I was lonely when I lived in our house by myself before it was sold. Being with your family makes me miss mine a little less."

That was nice to hear, and it was even nicer when Dan rested his hand on Owen's briefly before he went up to bed. Owen should have grabbed him and made him stay. His face heated at the thought of all the things he wanted from Dan. As he imagined going up after him, Owen gulped and cursed himself.

*

Owen had said he needed him. Dan couldn't hear that enough. As he spoke, Owen's eyes were a little bit sad but bright and warm. Dan felt like Owen's whole being was reaching out to him. Though they weren't

touching yet, Dan felt a connection that had a more than physical weight. At that moment, Dan almost launched himself at Owen to kiss him and hold him and make it real. He came to his senses just in time.

They sat quietly for a while. Owen placed his hand on his laptop but didn't open it. The house was quiet as was the whole world outside the big window. Dan felt that everything was hushed by the stillness between them. Dan put his hand on Owen's lightly. He felt the heat of Owen's hand and the coolness of the laptop. He didn't linger though. As Dan stood up and said goodnight, Owen looked at him. It was like he wanted to say or do something, but he only stared. Dan smiled at him and went upstairs. He didn't regret not making a move. Sometimes it was just good to feel close to someone late at night, to have a full heart even if you had to go to bed alone.

Chapter 6

The next day, Dan called Owen when his classes were finished.

"I was just about to call you," Owen said as soon as he answered.

"I know," Dan told him.

"How do you know?"

"I knew you'd worry after what happened to my tires."

"OK. Thank you for calling."

"I'm walking to my car now," Dan said, giving him a play-by-play report. "I'm looking it over, and it looks fine. No tire damage. No damage of any kind. I'll text you when I get home, and when I go get the girls, and when I have them in the car, and when I have them home."

"Umm. I was going to say that was overkill, but it would make me feel better," Owen admitted.

Dan laughed. "It's no problem. Text you soon."

Dan didn't mind texting Owen every second, but he really enjoyed hearing his voice. He loved the hesitations and especially the warmth and humor in his tone. Dan found that he couldn't stop smiling. Just talking to Owen for a few minutes did that to him. He was so screwed.

Since Owen needed to be reassured, Dan decided to do better than text him. After letting him know that he had the girls, he offered to pay Owen a visit at the real estate office. He was curious about the place where Owen spent half the day.

Wakefield Realty was located in a nice building of its own right on the corner of a quiet intersection. It looked upscale but not intimidating. Inside, it had the same vibe plus it looked pretty busy. Phones were ringing, people were talking business. One big, blond guy was laughing a throaty laugh while talking to Owen. Seeing that Owen was smiling, Dan felt his insides tighten with jealousy. The blond guy was muscular, a jock in his prime. He looked more like a football player than a real estate agent. Maybe he was both. Dan recognized his green blazer and emblem from the ads for Heath Realty, a well-known real estate firm in town. How could he wear that horrible blazer and still look good? The guy stepped away to talk on his phone, and the girls ran up to Owen.

"A bird was pecking at your car," Connie told him after giving him a kiss.

"We chased it away," Maggie said and gave him a kiss too.

"Thanks," Owen told them.

"Give us money," Connie said.

"No."

"Cheap, cheap," Maggie chirped.

"Next time we'll let the bird eat your car," Connie threatened.

"It would serve me right," Owen told them as they ran off to talk to the lady in reception.

"Who was that blond guy you were talking to?" Dan asked. He had to or he would burst.

"Why? Don't tell me he's your type," Owen said then quickly wiped the frown off his face. "That's Brad. He's the competition."

"Mine or yours?" Dan said. Good thing Owen didn't know what he meant.

"What?"

That's when the guy they were talking about came over and gave Dan a once-over and a big grin as he offered him his hand.

"Brad, this is..." Owen started to say, but Brad interrupted him.

"You don't need to introduce him. I know an angel when I see one."

"Do you know a nanny when you see one? This is Dan. He's taking care of the girls."

"I prefer manny," Danny said as Brad shook his hand for way too long.

"As do I," Brad said, putting a different spin on it and leering at Dan. His phone rang, and he dropped Dan's hand and excused himself.

As Brad got out of the way, Dan spotted an unbelievably cute guy behind a desk. Following his transfixed gaze, Owen sighed then said, "They can't both be your type. You want to meet him? That's Simon. He's the assistant I share with Yolanda."

Simon was Brad's opposite. He was thin, dark and very attractive with a cute afro and long eyelashes. He looked more like a model than a real, live human being. Seeing him, Dan glared at Owen.

"What did I do?" Owen asked.

"You hired him." Dan shot an accusing look in Simon's direction.

"Yolanda hired him."

"You had nothing to do with it? You didn't approve it?"

"Umm. Am I in trouble?" Owen asked.

"Yes. Why are you surrounded by gorgeous guys?" Dan asked. He didn't care if he was being completely unreasonable.

"You tell me," Owen said and looked him up and down like Dan had something to answer for as well.

Dan grumbled. He did have home field advantage, but in every other way he was outmatched. Simon was at least a year or two older and just too damn beautiful. Brad was way more accomplished. And God knows how many other guys were lurking out there ready to outdo him and steal Owen away.

"Am I supposed to say something to take that frown off your face?" Owen asked. "Because I'll say it."

Dan had to smile at him. "I guess you already did."

"Come on, let me introduce you to everyone. They've all been eyeing you like hungry beasts," Owen said. He put his hand on Dan's back lightly.

Dan felt himself melt inside. He had to concentrate really hard to remember the names and faces of the people Owen introduced him to. They were all a blur. All of Dan's attention was centered on that spot on his back where Owen's hand had rested for a moment. Tingling heat radiated from there as Owen's voice rumbled in his ear pleasantly, saying his name over and over again.

*

Having Dan and the girls stop by had brightened Owen's day. It was too bad that he couldn't skip work and go to a late lunch with them. Dan's jealous act was a nice boost to his ego. Owen couldn't help grinning at the thought that Dan might get possessive. Even knowing that what Dan said didn't mean anything, it still made Owen feel good. Everything about Dan made him feel good, too good. Owen was a little disturbed by how much pleasure he got out of introducing Dan to everyone. After all, he was introducing an employee, not his boyfriend. Too bad that happy and proud feeling inside him didn't seem to know that.

"Perving on the manny. Shame on you, Wakefield," Brad said, like he knew why Owen was grinning to himself like an idiot.

"You were the one perving on him," Owen shot back.

"And you were jealous," Brad said. "Wasn't he, Simon?"

Simon raised an eyebrow at Brad. "No comment about the man whose name is on the door and on my paycheck, and who is standing right there," Simon said. That was the same as saying he agreed with Brad.

That meant everyone could tell how Owen felt about Dan. How horrifying, but not surprising. Owen was completely out of his depth. He never had to hide these kinds of feelings before. He had never felt them until now. It was impossible not to want Dan, but Owen's feelings were getting stronger all the time, boiling over into something else. If only Dan was a terrible person with no charm, without a sunny smile, or beautiful eyes that beamed at Owen in a special way. But no, Dan had to be a gorgeous and lovable thorn in his side.

Owen was still worrying about his feelings for Dan when he got home.

The girls were in the mood to be nice, not scary, so they ran up to him to greet him with kisses and hugs. He gave them each a kiss on the cheek. Maggie came back for more.

"Me, me," she said, and Owen kissed her again.

"Me too," Connie said so she got another hug and kiss.

"Me now. I want to be even with Connie," Maggie demanded reaching up for another hug.

"You were even until you asked for one more," Owen said but gave her a kiss anyway. Then he had to give another one to Connie. "That's one more for my little jellybean. Now we're done," Owen said, cutting them both off.

"Who's jellybean," Dan asked the girls as he came down the stairs.

"No one," Connie said, but Maggie had already pointed a finger at her.

"You know you're my little jellybean," Owen told Connie.

"I'm not little. I'm big now. Maggie is little," Connie said.

Maggie stood on her tiptoes to try and look bigger.

"You're both little," Owen told them.

"We can't both be little. Look how much bigger I am," Connie said as she held her hand well above the top of Maggie's head and her own.

"What do you want me to call you?" Owen asked. "A potato? A potato is bigger than a jellybean. My little potato."

"Nooo!" Connie shrieked.

Maggie laughed.

"What do you call Maggie?" Dan wanted to know.

"Magpie."

"'Cause I'm sweet like pie," Maggie said.

"Yes, you are," Owen told her.

Dan looked at Owen but decided not to give Maggie any extra information about her nickname.

*

Dan liked that moment when Owen first arrived home from work. He got to see Owen as the girls made a fuss over him, chattering at him. That's when Dan could see pure love shining from his eyes. Those loving eyes would then turn to Dan, and Owen would smile and look away. He did it again today.

As the girls went off to play, he and Owen went into the kitchen.

"Do you call Maggie magpie because she likes shiny things or because she repeats everything Connie says?" Dan asked as Owen checked over the mail.

"Why do I have to choose? Both." Owen smiled to himself. "Maggie might look like Laura, but she's just like her dad. Mike and I were the goofiest kids you ever saw in your life. And Mike never grew out of it. He was a diamond in the rough while Laura was a polished gem. I would never have expected them to have such a great relationship. If I didn't love them both so much, I would have envied them."

"There's no reason why you can't have a great relationship," Dan said. He wanted to say "with me" but didn't dare.

After a quick, searching glance at Dan, Owen looked down.

"I bury myself in work and try not to think about what I don't have or to wonder if I ever will." Owen shrugged. "The girls give me so much, but I do ask myself if I can really live without love."

"That's not an option. I'm not allowing that," Dan told him vehemently. How could he look so hopeless and so gorgeous? Dan wondered if Mike and Laura had something to do with it. "You lost two people you loved. Maybe you're afraid of being with someone because you're afraid of losing them."

"Could be, but the fact is, it hasn't really come up. I haven't met anyone I wanted to get serious with."

"Maybe you weren't serious about looking," Dan accused him.

"I made an honest effort," Owen claimed.

"I bet it was more like a half-assed effort."

"I don't see you out there trying to find the right guy," Owen said.

"I keep my eyes peeled."

Owen smiled ruefully at Dan. "You have nothing to worry about yet. You don't need to rush. My life is exactly as it should be except for that one piece. You aren't there yet. You'll have plenty of time to look."

Dan nodded noncommittally, not liking what he heard. He did his best not to let Owen see his disappointment. When he looked at him, Owen only saw a college kid who hadn't even made a start building his life and career while Owen had everything. They were miles apart. Dan's heart sank. Owen might like him, but he couldn't take him seriously. If only Dan knew how to be less serious about Owen.

Chapter 7

As Dan was leaving class, he noticed that someone was approaching him. It was a cute guy named Xiao who was in one of his classes last year. Dan had been interested in him. They talked a few times, but then he found out Xiao had a boyfriend. Now the boyfriend was history, and Dan had his chance. As Xiao asked him out, Dan was ready to refuse without a second's thought. But then he stopped. If he said no, it was the same as saying that he was saving himself for Owen. Couldn't have that. Dan had to keep his feelings for Owen in check. Owen could never be interested in him. He dealt with people who owned mansions, and sometimes he dated them. That meant that Dan couldn't let himself get carried away by his longstanding, maybe permanent crush on Owen. Here was his chance to try and free himself of his hopeless yearning for a guy he couldn't have. Dan said yes and listened to himself making plans for a dinner and a movie while feeling like he was having an out of body experience.

Later on, when it was time for Dan to pick up the girls from school, Maggie was first. She always ran to him excitedly then turned back to wave at her friends. Lots of tiny hands waved back. Dan always had to make sure that she hadn't forgotten anything before he buckled her into her seat. Too many times he had to walk her back so she could get something she left behind. Connie finished school a little later so there was time for Dan to make a side trip.

"How was preschool today?"

"I learned lots of things," Maggie bragged.

"What did you learn?" Dan asked her.

She thought hard about it then she shook her head. "I don't know."

"Sounds like a productive day."

She nodded in agreement.

"We're making a stop here so I can drop off a book," Dan told her as he swung by Inez's house.

"That's a big book," Maggie said, seeing him get it out of his bag.

"It sure is. It's expensive too. I couldn't afford it by myself so Inez and I share it to save money," Dan told her.

After they went home with Connie, Maggie went straight upstairs. She came back down the stairs slower than usual. Dan heard a clinking noise as well as the sound of her footsteps. He was doing some cleaning and straightening in the living room when Maggie came running to him,

hugging a piggy bank.

"I have lots of money." She shook the piggy bank to show him.

"Wow! You're rich," Dan told her.

She nodded and laughed. "It's for you so you can buy a book."

"Really? That's so nice. Thank you. But I don't mind sharing. And your Uncle Owen pays me every week. So it's OK."

Maggie shook the piggy bank again. "Are you sure?" she said.

"I am. Thank you for offering. You're a good kid."

She plopped down on the couch next to Connie and watched him polishing the coffee table.

"That's good. Make the house smell nice," Maggie told him.

"How about if you two help me?" Dan said to the girls.

"No. We'll just watch," Connie said.

"We'll watch you," Maggie echoed.

"Not on your life. You're helping. We're all going to be cleaning," Dan told them and handed them each a cloth while he went to get the vacuum.

"Grandma never let us just watch either," Maggie grumbled.

After Owen got home, Dan joined him in his office. He wanted to tell him that he had a date that night, but he had trouble getting the words out.

"Maggie just tried to give me her piggy bank," Dan said instead.

"Those girls are sweet, and evil, and sweet." Owen then frowned. "Why did she want to give you her piggy bank?"

"I told her I couldn't afford to get a textbook I needed. There was no cheaper option so me and a girl from my class agreed to split the cost, and now we are sharing it," Dan explained.

"How much is it. I'll..."

"Are you going to offer me your piggy bank?"

"Maybe."

"Sharing is no problem. We sometimes help each other study so it works out fine," Dan told him. He appreciated his generous impulse, but he didn't want to take advantage of Owen.

"Are you busy?" Dan asked, seeing Owen at the computer. He was looking for an excuse to leave without telling him what he came to say.

"No. I just got some photos Mom uploaded," Owen said then he muttered under his breath, "No bathing suits. No bathing suits."

"That's a strange thing to want to see. Your mother and her new husband without their bathing suits," Dan said, deliberately misunderstanding him.

"Oh, God. Now I have to make time for a lobotomy to get what you said out of my head."

Owen called the girls in. After they were done looking and emailing Kate, he printed up a picture of his mother with a big floppy hat that both girls wanted. Maggie ran off with her copy, but Connie lingered to recruit Dan to play with them.

"Can't I hang out with Owen for a little bit?" Dan said.

"No. Uncle Owen is doing real estate. He's always doing real estate. He doesn't know how to have fun. Grandma is fun." She held up the photo he had printed for her as proof.

"That's why she's cavorting around Greece," Owen grumbled.

"She's a married lady now. Don't be jealous," Connie told him.

"I'm not."

"Stop being jealous of Grandma," Connie scolded him.

"No one is jealous," Owen claimed.

"She's cavorting around Greece. I'm kind of jealous," Dan said.

"Meanwhile I have clients who want to retract an offer after it was accepted, and a buyer who wants the seller to throw in the family heirlooms and hand over their first born," Owen complained.

"Kate is just setting a good example, showing you what you'll have to look forward to when you retire," Dan said.

"Mom isn't old enough to retire, and I am only eight years older than you," Owen told him, glowering.

"It seems like more than that. You did babysit me for about five minutes," Dan reminded him.

"What? Who?" Connie asked peering at Owen and Dan.

"I was babysitting Dan," Owen explained.

Hearing that, Connie marched up to Dan.

"Aha! I knew you were a kid," she told him.

"That was twelve years ago," Dan said.

That meant nothing to Connie. "Only kids have babysitters," she told him.

After Connie went away, Dan glared at Owen who was smirking at him.

"I'm going to lose all my authority," Dan said.

"You think you have authority? That tiny woman who just walked out is the one in charge," Owen informed him.

"The tiny woman is not in charge," Dan insisted.

"Just you wait."

"Why are you gloating?" Dan wanted to know.

"Misery loves company," Owen told him.

"What misery? You love being wrapped around their little fingers while playing the put upon family man," Dan accused him. "Admit it!"

Owen couldn't lie. "They're really nice to come home to."

"Like puppies?"

"That talk and demand money." Owen then started for the kitchen. "Have plans for dinner?" he asked. Owen was asking him about the menu, but it forced Dan to finally speak up.

"I do. I have a date tonight so ... I'll be going out," Dan said as awkwardly as he possibly could. He felt miserable saying it. What the hell? He felt like he had confessed to a crime, and he was now going to jail for it. This was so wrong.

To snap himself out of it, Dan mentioned some dinner options. Owen just stared at him.

"Don't worry about it. I'll order something," Owen said and went back to his office.

He looked so unhappy. Dan felt like hell too. As he went up to get some studying done, Dan almost called Xiao to cancel.

*

Owen thought he was going to be making dinner, maybe with Dan. After hearing about his date, Owen felt life drain out of him. He could barely manage to drag himself to his office. As soon as he sat down, he dropped into a slouch. He called in an order for pizza. He just couldn't face making dinner. At least the girls would be happy.

At dinner, he couldn't even eat one slice. Dan sat with them, but he didn't eat either. His date was after the girls' bedtime. That was probably for the best.

All this time, Owen had been in denial, hoping that he would never have to watch as Dan went out with other guys. That was stupid of him. Of course an incredibly hot, young guy like Dan was going to be hooking up with other hot guys. He might even get a boyfriend. Guys were probably lining up for a chance at him.

As the time for Dan to go out neared, Owen knew it was going to be painful. Why couldn't Dan be ugly so no one would want him then Owen could have him all to himself? Owen couldn't picture that. Dan was just too damn gorgeous.

When it was near the time for Dan to go, Owen sat at his desk and resolved to do some work. Or he might at least pretend so he could act casual when Dan left, looking fuckable for the benefit of some other man, who wasn't Owen and never would be Owen. Oh, crap. Owen slumped over his desk. He couldn't even manage to pretend.

Owen had been listening for Dan to come down the stairs, but he heard a much lighter footstep. Coming out of his office, he caught Connie sneaking downstairs. Maggie must have been asleep since she wasn't right behind her.

"Dan said he was going somewhere. What's he up to?" Connie wanted to know.

"Dan has a date tonight. He already told you," Owen reminded her.

"I thought he was kidding. Don't let him go. Tell him he's grounded."

"For what?"

"You're always punishing me for no reason. Make something up," Connie told him.

"I never punish you for no reason. You keep me very busy."

"Are you letting him go?" Connie wanted to know.

"He deserves to have fun." Owen looked up and saw Dan coming down the stairs. "See how nice he looks."

Dan had only gone to a little trouble. His hair was a little more carefully mussed. His clothes fit him better. He was even more gorgeous than usual. Owen was ready to forbid him to leave the house looking like that, but he quickly came to his senses.

"He doesn't look nice," Connie said. She folded her arms and turned away, jealous of the guy Dan was meeting. Like uncle, like niece.

"Do I need more glitter on me?" Dan asked her. "Is that the problem?"

"Stay with us," Connie pleaded, turning to him. Dan looked at Owen helplessly.

Owen forced himself to smile. The fact was he wanted him to stay too. He didn't want anyone else to have him. He just couldn't be honest about it like Connie.

"Have fun," Owen said to him as he left. Then he took Connie up to bed. He sat with her while she pouted then fell asleep.

Owen sat there as the girls slept. Thinking about Dan with another man filled him with such sadness. It had been nice to have Dan living with them like he was one of them, really a part of their lives. This night was just a painful reminder that the way things were right now wouldn't last.

*

It was a nice movie and then a nice dinner with a nice, good-looking guy, but Dan couldn't relax for even one second. The whole night he felt like he urgently needed to be somewhere else. It was sort of like the feeling that he forgot something. He had his keys, his phone, and his wallet. Nothing was

missing, except Owen sitting next to him in the movie theater and across from him at dinner. Dan tried to force himself to have a good time, but he couldn't shake that feeling. Something just wasn't right. Maybe he just felt no connection with Xiao. How could he when he was thinking about Owen every second?

The feeling that something was off started to disappear as soon as he got in his car to head home. It was completely gone when he walked through the front door. A surge of warmth replaced it, taking over his whole body when he saw Owen. He was sitting on the couch almost as if he was waiting for him. He didn't realize he was grinning until Owen said to him, "I guess it went well."

"The date? It was a bust. I mean it was OK. But there's nothing there."

Now Owen grinned but tried to hide it by turning away.

"I guess you don't want me to have a good time," Dan accused him and sat down on the other end of the couch, facing him. Looking at him, Dan felt like he was finally seeing some hope for the two of them. There was so much emotion written on Owen's face, which he was trying to hide. It was a revelation. Owen did want him. Dan was ecstatic, but why didn't Owen want him to know.

"I don't want anyone to have a good time as long as I'm a hermit over here," Owen said, still trying to hide what he felt.

"That means you'll have to take me out on a date," Dan blurted out.

"Why?" Owen asked, but he was looking at Dan like he was hoping to be talked into it.

"To make it up to me," Dan said.

"Make what up to you?"

"Ruining my date," Dan told him and it was just the pure, honest truth. "I kept wondering what it would be like if you were sitting next to me in a dark movie theater, if you reached to rest your hand on my knee and then moved it up slowly."

"Is that what he did?" Owen asked, clearly displeased.

"What? You want to beat him up?" Dan asked.

"Maybe," Owen admitted.

Dan was surprised and happy to hear it. Not about beating up poor Xiao, but that Owen might think of him as someone he didn't want to share, someone he didn't want another man to touch. Dan certainly felt that way about him. If Owen had been going out on a date, Dan would have barricaded the door.

"You want to be that guy sitting next to me, and I want you to be that guy," Dan said to him. "We have to go out."

"And what G rated movie should we watch while Connie and Maggie fight over the popcorn?"

If that was Owen's way of trying to weasel his way out, it wasn't going to work.

"Don't use the girls as an excuse. Mrs. Luden can babysit," Dan said.

Owen made no further objections. Dan stopped breathing for a second. It was happening. His fantasy was turning into reality. Owen had agreed and now he was staring into Dan's eyes, looking happy and scared. Seeing that look, Dan swore he would never again waste himself on another man. From now on, he would throw himself only at Owen. He would put his heart in Owen's hands.

Chapter 8

Owen had only been home a few minutes when he heard both Connie and Maggie raising their voices. He found them in the living room just as Dan came down the stairs to check on what the fuss was about.

"I'm busy," Connie claimed and stomped away.

Maggie scrunched up her face, mad but also like she might cry. Dan and Owen looked at each other. They each took on one fighting sister. Dan went after Connie, who was stomping her way upstairs. Owen picked up Maggie and held her in his arms.

"What's up, my little magpie? Huh?" Owen asked as he cradled her.

"Connie doesn't want to play with me."

"That's big kids for you. I'll play with you," Owen offered.

"Connie has to play with me. Why do I have to be little?" She turned her big, blue eyes to him questioningly.

"You'll get bigger. Don't worry."

"Then I'll be the big sister?"

"No. Sorry. You'll always be the little sister," Owen told her. As a little brother, he knew how she felt.

"Connie's always gonna be bigger?!" she said. Her eyes widened in alarm.

"I don't know about bigger, but she'll always be the big sister."

"No fair!"

"It's not so bad. Doesn't Connie have all the good ideas?" Owen asked her.

"Yeah," she agreed. "She thinks up lots of good stuff to do."

"Like hiding my car keys so I would have to stay home and play with you?"

"That was funny."

"Kind of," Owen said. One day the girls had decided that he shouldn't go to work and hid his keys. He spent almost an hour looking for them while the girls yelled warm, hot and cold at random. "You guys are a team."

"A team?"

"You're stronger together. And that's true even when you fight."

Maggie looked confused. The only one who could convince her was Connie, of course. It was up to the big sister to make things better.

*

Dan found Connie pouting in her room. He could tell that she didn't like fighting with her sister.

"I can't always play with Maggie. I'm big and she's little," she said as Dan sat next to her on the bed.

"Maggie looks up to you," Dan told her.

"That's because she's a midget. She has to look up at everybody."

"She's just little, like you were once," Dan reminded her. "Did you like it when big kids wouldn't play with you?"

"I don't know," she said, frowning. "I don't want Maggie to be sad. Little kids should never be sad. When Maggie is sad, I get sad too. I just got mad at her because she was bugging me."

"You want to go make her feel better?" Dan asked.

"OK. Maybe I can play with her just a little," she said and jumped up.

"Good. Grab some toys so she'll know you mean it," Dan said and took her hand.

She grabbed two dolls and looked cheerful at the prospect of making up with her sister.

After Connie came down, she and Maggie played downstairs for a while then they went up, getting along like nothing ever happened.

"OK. I'm exhausted," Owen said and sprawled on the couch.

"It wasn't that bad. How often do they fight?" Dan asked. He had only seen minor squabbles that evaporated as quickly as they started.

"Not too often. Maggie doesn't mind letting Connie take the lead. Their age difference seems much bigger now than it will in a few years. Connie is a winter baby. She turned six in January. Maggie is a summer baby. She turned four in July. But Maggie knows how to assert herself when she gets fired up. When I took them to the park last spring, Maggie saw this little boy push Connie. Maggie let out a war cry and she jumped this kid. If I hadn't pulled her off, she would have done some real damage. She was kicking and screaming, 'Don't push Connie! Don't push Connie!' I could barely hold onto her. Everyone was staring."

Out of all that, Dan only heard one thing that Owen said. "Some kid pushed Connie? What kid? I want a name."

"Take it easy. Maggie already took care of it," Owen told him with a smile.

The smile and the look in Owen's eyes made Dan want to kiss him.

"You didn't forget about our date did you?" Dan asked.

"How could I possibly do that? I'm going to call Mrs. Luden and ask if she can babysit tomorrow night. Is that soon enough for you?"

"You are looking at one happy guy."

"It's just a date," Owen said, but Dan could tell he didn't mean it as Owen

turned away and tried not to smile.

"No. I went on 'just a date'. That's what gave me the courage to ask you out," Dan told him.

"You didn't ask. You demanded reparations."

"Whatever gets the job done," Dan said to him with a shrug.

Slouching on the couch with his long legs sticking out under the coffee table, Owen was a tempting sight. Dan wanted to go over and straddle him. He couldn't do that yet. There was still some hesitation in Owen's expression.

As Owen eyed him with that cautious look, Dan couldn't help smiling like a fool. He never felt more excited about anything in his life. A date was just a date, but a date with Owen was a dream coming true. Dan was sure that it was a start of something amazing. That was a good way to think about it if he wanted to crash and burn on their first date. But he had been primed for this for so long. After waiting all that time, he had finally pulled the pin, and now he was just waiting for the whole thing to blow up in his face as he disappointed Owen with his lame idea of a date. Oh, crap.

Dan had considered taking Owen somewhere upscale and sophisticated where Dan didn't really want to go, couldn't afford, and where he would feel out of place like an art gallery opening followed by a dinner at a fancy restaurant. That just wasn't him. All he wanted to do was show him the real Dan, the guy he already knew. And hopefully Owen would see him as more than some college kid even if that's all he was. Anything else would be false advertising. After all, that's what he was offering Owen – just himself, preferably naked.

*

On the day of their date, Owen told the girls that he and Dan were going to have a grown up night out. Connie was a little suspicious but nothing Owen couldn't handle. He didn't want them to know it was a date. They wouldn't be able to keep things in perspective, not that Owen could either.

Owen couldn't remember being this nervous since his first gay date in college. And that date didn't have the promise of incredible happiness or total disaster the way this one did. He was overjoyed at the thought that Dan was attracted to him. Somehow a terrible thing like Dan dating another guy turned into something so good, which was also potentially devastating. If things between them fizzled, Owen knew he would be crushed.

Owen had arranged for Mrs. Luden to come over and stay at the house.

When she arrived, she was immensely relieved to find that the girls were already asleep. All of them hoped they would stay that way.

As he and Dan walked out, Owen headed for his car.

Dan stopped him. "I'm taking you out. That means we take my car. Welcome to the Dan Resnick experience."

"That's why I'm here," Owen said.

As soon as they got into Dan's Pontiac Sunfire, Dan grabbed Owen and planted a deep kiss on him. Owen was breathless and dizzy from it, completely unprepared for the way the kiss went right through him.

"Just wanted to get that out of the way," Dan said breathing hard as he stopped the kiss and started the car.

"Yes. I hate to have something to look forward to," Owen grumbled. He was pissed that the kiss ended so soon. But he did feel way less nervous now and a lot more aroused.

"You'll get another one. And maybe something more. We'll see how it goes," Dan said, playing it coy. He was so infuriating.

When they parked in front of the restaurant, Dan unbuckled and swooped in for another kiss. Owen was a little more ready this time and able to savor the taste and feel of Dan's mouth on his. Just as their tongues were searching and finding each other, Dan pulled back again and Owen groaned.

"I thought you got this out of the way already," Owen said, not happy that another kiss ended before he wanted it to.

"I felt that the sexual tension was getting a little thick," Dan said.

"And how does this help? It's like throwing gasoline on a fire," Owen told him.

"I could never be a firefighter, I guess," Dan said as he got out of the car. He leaned back down to ask, "Are you now picturing me in a firefighter's helmet and nothing else?"

"Well, now I am!" Owen grumbled as he got out.

"Sorry I couldn't take you anywhere nicer," Dan said as Owen eyed the restaurant.

Crony's was one of those places that promise not just food but also a good time. Owen was skeptical about that despite the garish lights and festive decor in the windows.

"If you let me..." Owen started to offer to pay, but Dan didn't even let him say it.

"I asked you out. I get to pay," Dan said. "This place doesn't look like much, but the food is killer. I mean that literally. They might as well hand

you a loaded gun."

"Sounds nice," Owen said.

"You'll love it," Dan assured him.

Actually Owen only cared about one thing when it came to their date – that it was with Dan. When he thought about how amazing that was, he felt almost giddy.

The interior of Crony's Restaurant was even more cheerful than the outside. The music was too loud and the people too talkative. The atmosphere left no doubt that everyone was having fun. Owen's first guess was that they served hard liquor, but he saw no sign of anything but beer. Because of the noise, the waiters and waitresses had to lean down to hear the customer's orders. Owen saw a waiter waiving them over to a free table.

"Hey, Dan. Hot date, huh?" their waiter said.

"As you can see. This is Owen," Dan said looking at Owen with pride.

Owen expected the waiter to laugh in his face. He grinned at Owen appreciatively instead.

"This is my friend, Jay. He'll be our waiter tonight," Dan said.

"That's my line," Jay said as they took their seats, and he handed them menus.

*

Dan found that he was very glad that Jay was working that night. He loved showing Owen off even if he didn't like admitting it. Owen didn't seem to get why Jay was looking at him like he could eat him up. Owen was tastier than anything on the menu that he was reading aloud.

"Bacon nachos. Bacon wrapped shrimp. Crunchy maple glazed bacon as a salad topping. I can feel my arteries clogging shut just from reading this menu."

"Told you," Dan said. "Have the blue cheese chicken."

"How do you know I like blue cheese?"

"I think Kate mentioned it when she and Mom were discussing wedding food. And yes, I memorized it so one day I could impress you," Dan admitted. He always kept his ears perked for any news about Owen.

"You mean so that one day you could endanger my health by enticing me with blue cheese stuffed chicken that's also breaded and fried," Owen said, but Dan knew he would order it anyway.

"Dangerous and delicious."

"Like you?" Owen said. He gave Dan a seductive look that pretty much proved he was the dangerous one.

Dan was ready to grope him under the table so he decided to warn him that he was playing with fire. "You better slow it down. If you're good, you'll get to taste me again soon."

"If I live through this dinner," Owen said, not looking at Dan. At the mention of tasting Dan, Owen had gulped.

Dan couldn't take his eyes off Owen's slightly flushed face. He was dying to show him the best time of his life, and that included everything he couldn't afford right now.

"When I get rich, I'll take you somewhere fancy where the whole entrée can fit on a teaspoon. I know this kind of place isn't what you're used to on a date."

"What do you think I'm used to?" Owen asked, looking perplexed.

"I heard about you and some rich guy."

"Ned? Mom must have been bragging, but that was just a fling."

"For you or for him?" Dan asked. He was afraid to find out more but also curious.

"Both," Owen said. Seeing Dan's expression, he asked, "Why do you look skeptical?"

"You don't seem like a fling kind of guy," Dan told him.

"I'm not that boring," Owen said defensively. "I fling! I can fling."

They were both leaning forward, and Dan regarded him with narrowed eyes. "To me, you look like a 'till death do us part' kind of guy."

Owen sat back and sighed.

"Damn. Is that's what's scaring them all off? That explains why I have no social life. I have wedding vows written all over me."

"That only scares away the cowards. The right guy will be all over you. Nothing will scare him off." Dan must have put too much feeling into his words because Owen looked at him intently. Dan looked away. This was a first date. It was too soon for Dan to declare his undying love. But he just wanted to let Owen know that the two of them were more alike than he realized, that they wanted the same things.

"And who have you been dating?" Owen asked him.

"Some nice guys who always end up as just friends," Dan said. "For the longest time I was hung up on this guy who was out of my reach, and no one else could compare to him."

"What happened with this guy?" Owen asked, looking grim. He fidgeted with his utensils to try and hide his displeasure at what he heard.

"I finally said, 'What the hell' and went after him. I'm going to be nailing him later."

After looking up at Dan in surprise, Owen hung his head and laughed. "I

don't 'nail' on the first date," Owen told him. He was blushing. When he raised his eyes to Dan again, his eyes were shining.

Dan shrugged and grinned at him.

"We'll do something good," he promised Owen.

"What do you mean you were hung up on ... me?" Owen still found it hard to believe.

"You've been driving me crazy since I was a freshman in high school. You came by to pick up your mom from our house. You were waiting for her outside, leaning against the hood of your car, talking on the phone. I drank you in from head to toe. I looked out my bedroom window, and I didn't take my eyes off you for one second. My brain was boiling over with fantasies about what we might do on the hood of that car."

"Seriously?"

"Very seriously. But I knew it was hopeless. I was a kid. And when I was old enough to have you, I heard you were dating some big shot lawyer and later some rich guy with more houses than I have shoes. First I was too young then I was a guy parking cars for a living, a nobody."

"You aren't a nobody. You're a great guy. I don't choose who I date based on their job or bank account," Owen told him, and Dan could tell that he meant it.

"Good. But I do have this awesome job now. You'd be impressed."

"Should I make a confession now?" Owen asked.

"You can't top mine," Dan said.

"Maybe not. I haven't been lusting after you for that long. But I didn't think I stood a chance with you either."

"You are kidding me. That's perfect. I'm glad we got that cleared up," Dan said. His heart was beating so fast.

When Jay brought their dinner, he looked from Dan to Owen and said a quiet "Enjoy" like he didn't want to disturb the mood.

Before he cut into his chicken, Owen gave Dan a warning glance.

"Don't look at me like you're ready to sweep our dinner off the table and do me right here." Owen spoke in a low, husky voice and leaned closer so Dan could hear.

"You read my mind," Dan said, leaning in too. Owen's voice and the alluring look in his eyes only encouraged dirty thoughts. Dan couldn't wait to put them into action.

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Owen was glad that Dan didn't want to linger at Crony's. He didn't want

to stay out too late, and he hoped to put the time that they had to good use.

"Where are we headed?" Owen asked as Dan drove toward the edge of town.

"I just want to make a quick stop," Dan said evasively.

He drove them to the Overlook Point at the top of Grisham Park. Gravel crunched under their wheels as the headlights cut through the darkness, revealing only greenery. The place was deserted, but Dan still passed up the open areas for a spot sheltered by bushes. Their view was partly obscured, but that wasn't why they were there. The pretty lights of the town twinkling in the distance didn't interest either of them. It was dark and quiet with only faint rustling sounds outside filling the silence once the car engine was off. Owen turned to Dan with a questioning look and a smile tugging at the corners of his mouth.

"I wonder what's here, other than you, me and no one to see what we might get up to," Owen said.

"You're reading too much into this. I was just looking for a place to park." Dan's real answer was his hand on Owen's thigh.

"And you are just looking for somewhere to rest your hand. I shouldn't read anything into that either?" Owen said.

"Am I sending mixed signals? I guess I better spell it out." Dan rested his hand on his crotch, which now bulged dangerously. "Still confused?" he asked while staring into Owen's eyes.

"Very," Owen told him. "I can't think straight when I'm around you." He was breathing hard as Dan's hand played with his cock, massaging it gently through his pants. Owen thrust into his hand, wanting more, but Dan's touch remained light and teasing.

"Good. That's what I was going for. I've been waiting too long for this," Dan said and his eyes burned into Owen's. Dan's blue eyes were full of desire and something nameless that reached out to Owen.

The next moment was breathless, timeless. All reason abandoned him. Owen just went for it. He grabbed Dan and kissed him hard. Owen felt Dan's mouth open to him. As Dan kissed back, the kiss went from hot to molten. Losing himself to it, Owen was dissolving into Dan's beautiful body and his luscious mouth. He was now almost completely on top of Dan, wedged against the steering wheel, grinding into him. Not taking even a single breath while he kissed him, Owen gasped as he drew back. Dan pushed him into his own seat.

"I need room to maneuver," Dan told him when Owen groaned in disappointment.

Leaning over him, Dan pushed Owen's seat back so he could kneel

between his legs. He was built. He needed the room. When Dan unbuttoned him and tugged at his zipper, Owen raised his hips and undid his own fly. He needed Dan so much. He was on fire and desperate for him.

Dan's mouth moved over his cock, tight and hot, taking him in slowly. A throaty moan escaped Owen, but Dan pulled off too soon and Owen whimpered. Dan stroked him with a sure touch and tongued his balls. Owen was gasping for breath. Then Dan's mouth was wrapped around him again. He moaned around his cock and took him deep. Dan's tongue swirled his cock, and Owen wanted to scream. The sight of his head bobbing in his lap was hypnotic. Owen tried to will himself to stay still, but Dan's mouth was so tight on him, pumping him fast and hard. Owen's body arched, no longer under his control. Dan had severed the connection between his brain and his muscles. His body only responded to what Dan was doing to him, thrusting into his mouth as he came. Owen didn't even have sense enough to warn him, but Dan was ready and swallowing every drop.

*

Owen's cock was long, thick and beautiful. Sucking it was heaven. It took everything in him not to come just from the feel and taste of Owen in his mouth. But Dan knew that if he was patient, there would be a reward.

As soon as Dan got back into the driver's seat, Owen was on him. Owen wrapped his hand around Dan's hard cock. Their foreheads touched first then Owen angled his face for a kiss. Then what Dan had been wanting for so long was happening. Owen's mouth was on his cock, tight and slick, charged with all of Dan's fantasies and then ten times hotter. Owen knew what he was doing, and Dan held out as long as he could to enjoy it.

Owen was too good, he had Dan coming like a live current was passing through him. Gasping for breath, they gazed at each other like they were under a spell. Owen reached out his hand and touched Dan's face. His eyes fell to Dan's mouth.

They kissed for a long time, their flies undone, their tastes mingling on their entwining tongues. They slowed to a stop and made themselves decent. Dan leaned his head on Owen's shoulder as they took in the faint sounds of nature and the view of the dark sky between the branches that hid them.

"This seems right," he said to Owen. It seemed perfect.

"Actually it's illegal. We could get arrested for what we were just doing in a public place."

"At least we made it count," Dan said then turned his head and kissed him. Owen's lips opened to him eager but soft. That kiss told Dan that they had time, that they were only beginning. There was no last kiss for them.

Their mouths met again when they parked in front of the house. The street was quiet. Only a handful of windows glowed up and down the block.

Before Owen unlocked the front door, Dan grabbed him and planted a deep one on him, stealing his breath.

"That was your official kiss on the doorstep," Dan informed him after they broke apart, breathing hard.

"Good thing you told me. I would have never figured it out," Owen said.

"So we're officially dating now, right?" Dan asked as Owen opened the door.

"I guess we are," Owen said.

"You can't tell? Oh, I'll show you. I'm gonna date you so hard," Dan vowed as they went in.

The house was silent at first. Hearing them come in, Mrs. Luden tiptoed down the stairs to say goodnight. Owen went up with Dan to look in on the girls. Then came the hard part – letting Owen go back downstairs to his own bed without him.

Chapter 9

Owen had just arrived home from work when he heard another man's voice coming from the kitchen. As he went in, he saw that the voice was coming from Dan's phone sitting on the counter. Dan was cutting up chicken for stir-fry. That's probably why he had this guy on speaker.

"Glad things are working out after all that nasty trouble you had with Keith," the voice on the phone said.

"I know. It's night and day. See you when you come down," Dan said and hung up. He noticed Owen and smiled.

"That was Antonio. You might get to meet him when he comes down from college in a few weeks," Dan said over his shoulder as he washed his hands. While drying his hands, he turned to Owen fully. "Are my eyes deceiving me, or are you this hot?"

"Your eyes are deceiving you. Maybe you need glasses," Owen told him, feeling a little glum after what he overheard.

"My hands never lie to me. I'll just confirm..." Dan started to move toward him, flexing his fingers.

"Don't even think about it," Owen told him, but he couldn't help smiling.

"Damn," Dan said while doing a thorough visual strip search.

"It's no great loss. Go feel up that Antonio," Owen said. Dan had mentioned the name before but not in any way that made Owen worry.

"You're jealous of Antonio. I consider that a good sign. It means I've got my hooks in you." Dan started moving in for a hands-on inspection again.

"Jealousy is not good," Owen said as he evaded him.

"It is when it makes those eyes of yours blaze. You are so smoking hot right now. But you have nothing to worry about there. If anything was going to happen between me and Antonio, it would have happened already. We are just friends."

"With benefits?" Owen wondered.

"We fooled around a little. Just to make sure there was nothing there," Dan said with a shrug.

"Of course. You had to make sure," Owen said sarcastically.

"I only have eyes for you. And hands," Dan said, making another grab for him. This time, Owen let Dan's arms encircle him. His hands slipped around and down Owen's back. "Look how cooperative you are. I like that," Dan said as he pressed into him and groped his ass.

Owen shook his head. He succumbed to him so easily. "What can I say, I'm your bitch."

"I would use a different word."

"Like what?"

"My man, my hot, sexy man."

"That does sound better," Owen said and he kissed him. He felt Dan's lips flutter against his. His tongue played with Owen's, but the kiss stayed tender and tantalizing like a promise that there was so much more to come.

Owen didn't ask Dan about the trouble Antonio mentioned. It worried him that this was something Dan didn't bring up on his own. Owen liked Dan too much. He didn't want anything to come between them when they had just started dating. What was he afraid he would find out? This was Dan. But Owen still felt a tightening in his stomach. Owen was afraid to find out anything bad about Dan. Even if he was too good to be true, Dan was too important to him now. He couldn't stand the thought that anything would spoil what was happening between them. But for the sake of the girls, he knew he would have to ask.

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Maggie had made something in preschool out of papier-mâché. She let Owen and Dan admire it. Neither one of them knew what it was. While Owen set the table with Connie's help, Dan helped Maggie put her creation on display. She pointed at the high shelf by the window where some porcelain figurines were lined up.

"Put it up there next to the other bird," Maggie said. So that thing was supposed to be a bird.

"Why can't you do it?" Dan asked.

She reached up to show him. "My arms are too short."

"Just your arms? I think it's more than that," Dan told her as he put the alleged bird on display next to a delicate bird figurine. "You short human beings sure need a lot of help."

"Now I want a snack," Maggie said.

Connie came over to second that.

"You don't want snacks before dinner," Dan told them.

"Yes, we do. Kids know what they want," Connie insisted.

"Give kids what they want," Maggie said.

"Listen to them. Next they'll be holding up protest signs," Owen said.

Getting nowhere with Dan, Maggie turned to Owen and pointed at the top cabinet.

"You can help too. I want a snack. I can't get it. I'm a short human being. I need lots of help."

Dan and Owen laughed.

"You're a cute human being," Owen told her. She was happy to hear it. "You're a cute human being too, Connie. I can see you making green eyes at me."

"I don't have green eyes," Connie said. "What about a snack?"

"No snack. It's too close to dinner."

They both started a chorus of whining.

Owen went over to the stove and showed them the rice that was cooking and the chicken and vegetables waiting to go in the wok.

"You see that? That's our dinner. If we eat snacks before dinner, we'll hurt its feelings. Now go play before I give you some chores to do," Owen threatened them.

They looked from Owen to Dan, found no sympathy and left.

"Your parenting style makes me dizzy," Dan said and sneaked a kiss. "I hope you're planning our next date."

"All the time," Owen said. He skimmed the back of his hand down Dan's front making him shiver. That wasn't enough contact, not nearly enough.

"You better plan our next date. You saw where we end up if I do it," Dan reminded him as added incentive.

"I liked where we ended up," Owen said shyly.

Dan knew he wasn't talking about the restaurant. He wrapped Owen in his arms and kissed him.

"If the girls catch you doing that..." Owen started to say.

"I refuse to live my life in fear of tiny human beings."

"They are relentless. They have no mercy. And they are inexhaustible. They're like tiny Terminators," Owen said, but he didn't move from Dan's embrace.

"You're not afraid of them. You're worried about them," Dan told him.

Owen admitted that he was right. "I don't want to confuse them. But I'm not kidding about the horror we would unleash either. They are all over you now. What do you think will happen when they find out you're dating their favorite uncle?"

"Only uncle."

"Him too."

Dan cupped Owen's jaw with one hand and kissed him. He did it slowly, with his eyes closed tight. The taste and feel of Owen's mouth were his world. As Dan kissed him, he could feel Owen's whole body shuddering through that kiss. Setting his whole body on fire, Owen wrapped himself around him. Owen and Dan took a moment to make out right there in the kitchen. They could hear the girls stomping around upstairs so there was no

chance of getting caught. Getting hard and feeling Owen's cock grinding into him, Dan pulled back. At first Owen made a complaining sound, then he smiled.

"Stop making me happy," he said to Dan.

"Why?" Dan asked as he ran his hands up and down his arms then linked them around Owen's waist.

"Because it won't last and then I'll be miserable," Owen said with sad eyes.

"Are you planning to dump me?"

"No. Never." Owen looked stricken at the thought.

"Good. Then I don't see an end in sight," Dan said with a big grin. He was promising himself to Owen at that moment though in his heart he had already done it.

"Dan," Owen said, warning him that he was rushing.

"I mean it. I got you and I am never letting you go," Dan assured him, but since Owen still looked unconvinced, he switched gears. "If you want me to behave myself, you should hurry up and take me out so I can get it out of my system. Where's that date you promised me?"

"I guess you need wining and dining."

"I don't. You do. That way you'll know I'm serious and that my intentions are pure," Dan said.

"Pure? With your hands on my ass?"

Dan's hands had traveled south and were rubbing Owen's ass.

"I am dirty of mind, pure of heart," Dan said, not stopping what he was doing and adding a kiss. With Owen's encouragement, he didn't stop misbehaving until the girls came down to demand dinner.

The minute dinner was over, the girls started asking if it was snack time. They kept at it as they helped clear the table and put the dishes in the dishwasher.

"Is it snack-time now?" Connie asked when it was all finally done.

"It's ice cream time," Owen told her.

Owen got out the bowls. He offered one to Dan, but strawberry ice cream didn't appeal to him. Owen wasn't having any either. As Dan scooped out the ice cream, the girls both watched him, eagle-eyed.

"She has more."

"She has more."

"You can't both have more," Dan told them.

"Those aren't for you anyway. They are for me and Dan," Owen claimed.

Dan played along. He handed Owen a bowl of ice cream and took the

other one for himself.

"We don't get any?" Maggie said pitifully. She was ready to cry.

"You can have some of mine," Dan told her.

Maggie went over eagerly, and Dan handed her an extra spoon as he took a seat at the kitchen table.

Connie looked on jealously as Dan let Maggie hog the ice cream.

"I'll share with you if you want," Owen offered as he sat down across from Dan.

"I want my own," Connie said.

"You don't want to share with me?" Owen gave her a sad-eyed look.

Connie pouted then went to get a spoon for herself and climbed in Owen's lap. She and Maggie polished off the ice cream with no help from the guys. Even after Owen set aside the empty ice cream bowl, Connie stayed where she was.

"You love me?" Owen said.

"Yes," Connie told him with a serious face.

"How much? Maybe a lot?" Owen prompted her.

"Don't be greedy," she told him then grinned at him. She leaned in and whispered, "I love you lots and lots. But don't tell anyone."

Owen kissed the top of her head. "I'll keep your secret."

"Now you!" she demanded.

"Me what?" Owen said, playing dumb.

"Say you love us and you miss us and you wish you could be home all day to play with us," Connie said.

"Bite your tongue," Owen told her, but he couldn't keep a big smile off his face. "I can't believe it, but she is kind of right," Owen said to Dan.

"You mean a hundred percent right," Dan told him. "And all your griping is just BS."

"Twenty percent is BS, The rest is pure self preservation."

Connie couldn't follow what they said so she looked between them suspiciously.

"I was telling Dan how much I love you guys," Owen told her and she beamed at him.

Seeing Connie on Owen's lap, Maggie shouted, "Make room, make room for Maggie!" and climbed on his lap too.

"She got in between," Connie complained when Maggie settled herself in front of her.

Owen shifted Maggie over to nestle against his other shoulder.

After some jostling, the girls settled down. Seeing Owen with the girls in quieter times like this was kind of funny. It was hard to believe they could

be so sweet and undemanding. Owen looked at Dan and smiled. As far as Dan was concerned, Owen was the perfect man, a little sarcastic, a little insecure, loving and beautiful. "He's mine," Dan wanted to tell the whole world, but not until he got a second date out of him.

Chapter 10

After the girls were in bed, Owen got the courage to ask Dan about what he overheard earlier. They were sitting together in the living room, side by side on the couch. Hearing his question, Dan tensed a little.

"You're going to love this," Dan said with a sigh. "When Antonio and I worked for the valet service, we were still kind of fooling around."

"Just to make sure you weren't into it?" Owen said.

"Exactly. One day, this guy, Keith, caught us making out. He said some seriously ugly shit, venting his homophobia. We told him where he could stick it. After that, Keith wouldn't let up, saying shit to our faces and behind our backs. Our boss was a nice guy, but he didn't know how to handle him. Antonio was going back to school at the end of the summer anyway. I wanted to keep working there until I found something better so I stayed. One day I found our boss's credit card in my locker. That scared me. I gave it back to Mr. Douglas, our boss, and he found some charges on it he didn't make. He said Keith told him that he saw me lurking outside his office. Mr. Douglas believed me when I said I didn't take his card, and he didn't report it. He said, 'I know you didn't do it, but the police might believe Keith.' I was ready to call the cops anyway. That's when Mr. Douglas warned me that Keith's older brother was a cop. I had to stop and think. It looked bad for me. I couldn't risk it. So I thought about what to do next. I could let Keith make his next move and hope I catch him in the act. Either I needed proof, or I just needed to get the hell out of there. I chose B. I wasn't going to keep that job anyway. It wouldn't have paid me enough to live on once I moved out of the house and had to pay rent. I figured I should cut my losses. I felt like a coward but..."

"No. It was the right move. Who knows what he might have pulled next. I'm just sorry that asshole got away with what he was doing," Owen said.

"Me too."

Owen could tell that it hurt Dan's pride to retreat instead of dealing with the problem head on, but Owen was glad Dan had gotten out. He hated to think what might have happened if things kept escalating with that guy. Owen took Dan in his arms and held onto him tightly for a while.

"That feels really good. Where's my date night?" Dan demanded.

"Isn't there any other way to keep you subdued?"

"What were you thinking of?" Dan wondered.

"Why don't I surprise you," Owen said. That night, he was finally ready to do something he had been fantasizing about since Dan first moved in.

After an hour, when he was sure the girls were sound asleep, Owen walked up the stairs exhilarated. He stopped in front of Dan's door. It stood open. Owen knew he only closed it once he went to bed. He wanted to be able to hear if the girls needed him.

That meant Owen could just walk in, but he knocked lightly on the doorjamb.

"You weren't kidding," Dan said when Owen walked in and locked the door behind him. Dan set aside his phone in mid text as a big, happy smile spread across his face.

"The walls are good and thick, and the doors are solid, but we'll have to be quiet," Owen whispered. He was glad Dan's room was on the other side of the hall from the girls' room.

Owen liked how Dan looked, sitting sideways on his bed, one knee up, legs apart. Dan's position gave him a clear path to what he wanted, but Owen was determined to take his time. That wasn't going to be easy when the wicked gleam in Dan's eyes welcomed him and offered him anything he wanted.

Going over to him, Owen kneeled on the bed and grabbed Dan by the waist. He pulled Dan to him and watched him as he moaned in anticipation. As he shoved his hips into him, Owen could feel that he was already getting hard. While looking into his eyes, Owen started to grind into him. They eased into a soft kiss, deliberately holding back the flood of passion that was inside them. In the midst of kissing, consumed by the feel of Dan's sensuous mouth and his exploring tongue, Owen fumbled with Dan's clothes. Dan got in his way by trying to strip him as well. Owen grabbed his hands. He held them for a moment and pressed them to his chest. He shook his head because at first he couldn't breathe.

"I'm going to unwrap you," Owen said.

"I like to just rip right into the gift wrap, get to the good stuff fast," Dan said, trying to derail Owen's plan.

Owen shook his head again.

"I'm going to do it my way," Owen told him. He brought Dan's hands to his lips and kissed them before he let them go.

Dan shuddered visibly and laughed. "I'm in for it," he said as Owen pulled up his t-shirt with deliberate slowness, but only enough to reach under it. He didn't remove it yet.

Owen pushed Dan down on the bed so he could kiss his abdomen. It was tight with muscles clearly outlined. While licking his abs, Owen inhaled the clean scent of his skin. Finally Owen peeled the t-shirt off his beautiful torso and pulled it off his arms. Owen ran his hands over Dan's powerful

chest knowing that half naked wouldn't do. Unbuttoning Dan's fly, Owen pulled his jeans and boxers off his hips and down his legs without rushing. He yanked his socks off too.

This was it – his first sight of Owen's magnificent body fully naked. There wasn't a more perfect human being. Dan's cock stood up, thick and proud. His legs and arms were beautifully muscled. His chest was perfection. Owen didn't know where to start. Where had he left off? His hands didn't wait for a decision. They roamed Dan's body of their own free will. God, he felt good, supple and strong. Bending over him, Owen licked a path from his navel to his throat. He kissed his neck then his shoulder. Chest to chest with Dan, he could feel his ragged breathing and the powerful beating of his heart.

"Please," Dan said as he tugged at Owen's clothes with shaking hands.

As he looked into Dan's eyes, Owen saw they were a little glazed. The dreamy, lost look drew Owen down to him. First Owen let Dan undress him, but he didn't let him play. When Dan started to kiss and lick his chest, Owen pulled Dan's head up and kissed his eager mouth. The kiss was brief because the rest of Dan needed his attention.

Every inch had to be tasted and committed to memory. Owen drew a plaintive sound from Dan with every touch of his lips and tongue. As Owen traced a line from his knee up the inside of his thigh with his fingertips, Dan's hips pushed up from the bed, seeking contact. Owen didn't give it to him, but he did hold him tighter as he nibbled on his ear. His hand continued to travel up the inside of Dan's thigh.

Dan's skin had turned from warm to hot under his touch. Dan was moaning continuously. As he groped Owen, his hands were rough and trembling. His eyes begged. His hips thrust into Owen involuntarily even as he tried to behave. Owen knew he'd had enough. He earned his release for good behavior. Owen pressed him to the mattress firmly then leaned over him. Taking Dan into his mouth with one gulp, he felt Dan's gentle, strong hands on his hair. As Owen sucked, his hands roamed the contours of Dan's body.

*

Owen's patient, loving attention had Dan going out of his mind. Just the sight of Owen sneaking into his room had him going. Then there was his demanding touch and the way he kissed – tender but passionate. He followed that up with the promise to unwrap him slowly, delivered in that husky voice. There was naked greed in his eyes for every inch of Dan he

exposed. His groping hands and his sweet, hot mouth set every part of him on fire. At his mercy, Dan wasn't even human any more. His whole being was begging to come at any cost. At the same time, he loved indulging Owen, letting him roam his body to his heart's content. He would let Owen do anything he wanted to him, the whole time knowing he would only do good things.

Owen ran the edge of his teeth over his neck, sending goose bumps down Dan's spine. From there, his mouth meandered down his body. That's when Owen turned from cruel to merciful. The heat of his mouth took Dan deep inside. Owen's tongue was busy massaging his cock as it disappeared between his lips. His mouth closed around Dan tightly for a slow pull. When his cock popped free of that hot, wet grip, Dan whimpered. Owen smiled up at him. Leaning back down, he caressed Dan's balls with the tip of his tongue then took each one into his mouth. Dan couldn't take much more. That's when Owen slipped a finger inside him, and Dan lost his mind. He was babbling and moaning. As Owen moaned around his cock, almost growling, the vibrations from his throat moved up Dan's spine. His whole body shuddered violently as Owen's mouth pumped him. Finally, riding a wave of the purest pleasure he had ever experienced, Dan bucked and gushed down Owen's throat.

Dan was now exhausted but not sated. He wouldn't be satisfied until he had Owen coming just as hard. Eating up Owen with a predatory gaze, Dan could see he wasn't far from it. Owen's eyes were wild as he looked at Dan. Reaching behind him, Dan only thumbed his hole lightly and Owen thrust up into Dan's hand and back down wanting him inside. Dan obliged him, sliding in a finger. Stroking him inside, Dan kissed his throat. Owen's arms were around him like steel. With his head thrown back, he was grinding into Dan. Dan pushed him down on the bed and felt him struggling. He was so far gone. Owen stopped thrashing only when he felt Dan's lips grazing his cock. Then he stilled and let out a long moan.

"Oh, I missed this," Dan said as he took him in his mouth. God he loved the taste of him. Dan sucked him like a starved animal. Owen had primed him for just this. Now Dan wouldn't be satisfied until he had Owen coming like a volcano.

Owen did him proud. Muscles taut, hips off the bed, Owen came and came. Dan could hardly keep up with the powerful stream that shot down his throat. He swallowed. He choked. He had to have it all. Owen was still moaning and panting as Dan spread himself out on top of him. Digging his fingers through his hair, Dan kissed him deeply, never wanting to come up for air.

Their fierce, moaning kiss slowed, and Owen turned them both so he was lying on Dan's chest.

"I love feeling your heart beat." Owen turned his head up for a kiss.

"I love everything about you," Dan wanted to say. But it was too soon to say that. He just thought it and let the words and the feeling flow out of him through their next kiss.

"Did you feel anything?" Dan asked him when the kiss ended.

"I felt everything," Owen told him in his warm, sleepy voice as if he was only half awake and already dreaming.

Dan kissed him again, more softly this time not wanting to disturb whatever dream he was having. He could feel Owen falling asleep, naked in his arms. That was an amazing feeling, more intimate than sex somehow. Too bad he would have to wake him soon. He wished they could stay like this until morning and then every night. But they couldn't yet. This was just a tantalizing taste of the future to drive him crazy until it became reality. From now on, Dan was never going to get any sleep. Every night he was going to wonder if Owen would visit him again.

Chapter 11

Owen had gone to the office a little earlier than usual. As Dan was helping the girls get ready for school, he noticed that Maggie seemed to be winding down. By the time Connie was off to school, Maggie didn't seem like herself. He touched her forehead and noticed that she was just a little warm, but it was her lack of energy that convinced him to call Owen.

"Hi. I want to keep Maggie home from preschool. She feels a little warm, and she's being a little too quiet. Mrs. Amano already picked up Connie."

"I'll come home," Owen said right away.

"You don't need to rush. It doesn't look too bad," Dan assured him.

"I'll be useless here anyway."

When Owen came home, he went straight to the living room where Dan had brought Maggie's pillow and blanket. She was sitting up on the couch and playing, but he could tell right away that she wasn't a hundred percent. She reached up her arms as soon as she saw Owen, and he sat down to cuddle with her.

"My sick little magpie. Not too warm," Owen said when he kissed her forehead.

"It hasn't gone up since I first checked," Dan told him.

"Aren't you going to be late for class?" Owen asked.

"I'm ditching." Dan didn't even consider going to school.

"I'm staying home, you can..." Owen started to say, but Dan shook his head.

"I'll feel better if I stay," Dan said.

"You're supposed to be the easygoing one, not the worrier," Owen told him.

"I'm not worried," Dan said, speaking to Maggie. "You're going to be all better soon."

"Yeah," she agreed. "I have to. It's no fun being sick. I don't want to be stuck home with you guys."

"What?" Owen said with a laugh.

"All my friends in preschool are doing stuff. I'm missing it," she said.

"You better hurry and get better then," Dan told her.

"I guess it's not too bad if she's well enough to insult us," Owen said.

Maggie's fever stayed about the same for the rest of the day. When Dan came back from picking up Connie from school, they found Owen busy in the kitchen. He was making chicken soup from scratch.

"It's to give me something to do so I don't fuss over Maggie every second," he told Dan.

"Connie and I will fuss over her for you," Dan said. He told Connie his plan. "We can play hospital. You can be Maggie's doctor, and I'll be the nurse."

"Call me Dr. Connie," she said, immediately getting into the role.

"Of course, Dr. Connie. We'll borrow a white shirt from Owen's closet and that can be your doctor's coat."

Maggie was a good patient, but eventually Dan decided to give her a break from Connie's doctoring and let her rest.

"I want you to prescribe a nap for her now" is how he put it to Connie. "We'll wake her for dinner. OK?"

Owen came over to check her temperature before she was asleep.

"Mommy used to sing me a get well song when I was sick," Connie said and sat down close to Maggie. "Like this: Get well soon, my sleepy little angel. Get well soon so we can have lots of fun. Get well soon with hugs and kisses from your mom and your dad too," Connie sang tunelessly.

"That's a good song," Maggie said.

"Yes, it is," Owen agreed. Dan could tell that he had been a little choked up until Maggie spoke to break the spell.

Once Maggie was asleep, the three of them went to the kitchen. Connie was thoughtful.

"I used to dream that Mommy and Daddy were sitting in my room when I was sleeping," she said as she took a seat at the kitchen table, and Dan and Owen sat down with her. "When I woke up, I would stay with my eyes closed so they wouldn't go away."

"They are always with you, honey," Owen told her.

"Maggie doesn't remember them," Connie said sadly.

"It's good that you do," Dan told her.

"But I want Maggie to remember them too," Connie said.

"We'll tell her lots of stories then she will," Owen said to her.

At Maggie's bedtime, Connie did just that. She sat on the edge of Maggie's bed and flipped through a photo album. Connie showed her pictures while she talked, and Maggie listened attentively.

"Me and Daddy liked to read comic books together. But not Mommy. But sometimes Daddy would read Mommy a comic because he thought it was really good, and she would go like this." Here Connie rolled her eyes in imitation of her mother, and Maggie laughed.

Connie put a finger to her chin as she thought of what else to say. She looked through the album for inspiration. Coming to a picture of Owen and their mother, she continued.

"Mommy and Uncle Owen were best friends. Mommy said she picked Uncle Owen to be our uncle even before she picked Daddy to be our dad."

Maggie nodded and smiled up at Owen.

After Maggie was asleep, Connie looked kind of down. First, Owen made sure she wasn't sick too. She wasn't. Owen went to Dan's room with her so they could talk and not wake Maggie. Dan cleared some stuff off his bed so Owen could sit down with Connie in his lap.

"Tell me about it, jellybean," Owen said and wrapped her in a hug. Then he pulled back a little to see her face as she talked.

"I was telling Maggie about Mommy and Daddy, and I made myself sad," she said. Every time she blinked a tear dropped off her eyelashes. Owen wiped her face then got a tissue ready to wipe her nose.

"That's because you miss them. I miss them too. Your mom and dad were the best," Owen told her in a hushed voice.

"Yeah," she agreed through tears, getting a very serious look on her face. She sniffed and Owen tried to wipe her nose. "I'll do it," she said, taking the tissue from him.

"That's right. You're my big girl," Owen told her and hugged her again.

"I'm not a crybaby," she insisted, looking from Owen to Dan.

"No, you're not. You're my brave girl and a good big sister," Owen told her as she snuggled up against him.

Watching Owen with Connie in his arms, Dan could tell that the two of them had a bond of shared pain. She knew that Owen understood her completely in moments like these. Connie even looked like Owen, but it was the closeness between her and Owen that made Connie look like his daughter.

Dan and Owen watched TV with Connie for a little while until she was ready for bed. Owen stayed with her and held her hand until she was asleep.

When Owen came to join him in his room, Dan could tell that Connie's tears were on his mind.

"It hurts me so much to see her cry," Owen said in a whisper. "It brings it all back. When Mom and I had to tell her." Owen looked at Dan, feeling the weight of all that sadness all over again. "It was so hard to be alive knowing that the two best people I knew were gone. I just kept telling

myself over and over again, 'Mom and the girls need you. They need you. You can't fall apart.' I would be numb for hours, working or whatever, then suddenly I would feel this crushing pain, and I wouldn't be able to breathe. I was a wreck. Mom was a wreck. We just pushed through one day then another. Then months later, I remember it was a little easier. The pain was still there, but there was more love than pain."

Dan wrapped Owen in a tight hug. He wanted to take away every last bit of pain that remained and replace it all with his love.

*

After they put the girls to sleep that night, Owen stayed in Dan's room, not to fool around though. They left the door open and went in to check on Maggie all night. Her fever had gone down, but they wanted to make sure it stayed that way. They took short naps, but neither of them slept for long.

Dan was doing some reading for school, leaning sideways on his bed. Owen was stretched out lengthwise and using Dan's legs as a pillow. Dan's hand made lazy patterns on his chest. Sometimes Owen heard him turn a page or scribble something. Owen put his hand over Dan's and ran his fingertips over his knuckles.

"How is this for a second date?" Owen asked.

"You're calling this a date? You are in so much trouble," Dan told him.

"Any uninterrupted time with you is a date." Or at least that's how it seemed to Owen. It always felt like they were getting closer, taking steps toward something. Something deep and lasting, Owen thought. But it was too soon to think that way. Owen knew he better hold back if he didn't want to scare Dan and dash his own hopes in the process.

Every day he spent with Dan reaffirmed his trust in him. Late into the night, it felt good to have Dan there by his side, watching over Maggie. Owen was surprised that a young guy like him could make him feel so secure. That's why it was so hard not to rush ahead into a future with Dan that seemed more real all the time. It was only when he counted their dates that he knew he was crazy to think that way. One date plus every day spent together, growing closer – that had to count for something.

Chapter 12

To celebrate Maggie feeling better just in time for the weekend, they had all gone to the mall on Friday. They stopped by Owen's friend's accessories store and made plans for Eve to babysit Saturday night so Owen could take Dan out on a real date.

Since Dan and Owen were going out for a grownup movie night, the girls demanded their own movie night. Eve came over armed with girlie movies. Owen said that she was always a hit with Connie and Maggie. Dan wasn't surprised. Eve was petite and pretty with long hair. She was like a living doll. Owen thought it was for other reasons.

"She understands them perfectly, and she always lets them stay up late," Owen said while looking at Eve accusingly. She just shrugged.

Seeing Owen and Dan dressed and ready to go, the girls rushed over.

"Is it movie time?" Connie asked, looking up at Owen.

"It's movie time for everybody," Owen confirmed.

Dan wondered if Connie would be able to guess that they were going on a date, but she let them go without a fuss.

Owen drove this time, but Dan wasn't sure about this weird route they were taking to the movie theater. Dan figured out what Owen was up to when he took the turn that would take them to the make out spot from their first date. Owen parked in the same place and shut off the engine. The night was filled with the same silence occasionally broken by the hushed sounds of nature. The moon was fat and yellow in the dark sky that still held a hint of blue. The place brought back all the crazy, happy feelings from their first time. Dan smiled to himself as he remembered how nervous and excited he had been to have his dream finally coming true.

After a moment when he might have been thinking back and remembering the same things, Owen turned to him with a hungry look.

"This is so you don't grope me in the movie theater," he explained.

"Nothing can keep me from groping you in a dark movie theater," Dan told him.

Owen might claim that he was preventing trouble, but he was just starting it. He ran his hand up Dan's thigh, reenacting their first date. This time Owen took the first turn. After squeezing him through his jeans, he unbuttoned Dan's fly and let his cock spring free, already hard. He caressed him appreciatively, weighing in his hand what he was going to take into his mouth in one second. After a thorough kiss, his head went to Dan's lap. Dan moaned in tune with the slide of Owen's mouth from the head almost

to the root of his cock. Owen gripped his thighs for leverage so he could pump his mouth over Dan's cock hard and fast. When he reached down for his own fly, Dan stopped him.

"No, mine," he said in a breathless voice.

Owen must have liked the sound of that too much not to obey. Even as Owen sucked him harder all the time, Dan couldn't wait to do the same to him.

"We're officially late," Owen said seeing the time and the full parking lot. "And I don't see one decent parking spot."

"So we'll miss the coming attractions," Dan said. To him, it was well worth it.

"And end up with bad seats," Owen complained.

"Drop me off in front so I can grab us decent seats. You go find a parking spot," Dan said. It was his fault after all. They were late because he had to have Owen's cock.

Owen pulled up in front of the movie theater to let Dan out. As he stepped out of the car, Dan spotted Keith Mitchum. Dan turned away from the unpleasant sight and walked toward the line of people waiting to buy tickets. Out of the corner of his eye, he tried to see where Keith was but he was gone. Dan was relieved, and he was pretty sure Keith wouldn't be going to see the foreign movie Owen was taking him to see.

While he was looking around, Dan tried to spot Owen's car. There he was. He had parked and was getting out. Dan now spotted Keith as well. He was going in Owen's direction. He had to have seen Dan get out of Owen's car. That's why he was headed that way. Dan rushed toward them. A car honked at him as he crossed without looking. He saw Keith bump into Owen, and he ran over to them.

*

Owen was making his way toward the movie theater when a young, blond guy bumped into him. In the process, he knocked Owen's keys out of his hand. Owen could swear that it wasn't an accident. It seemed to him that the guy had deliberately bumped him and swiped at his hand. He was now apologizing in a mocking tone. "Sorry, man, didn't see you there," he lied. He had definitely seen Owen.

Owen's keys were lying on the ground. He moved to reach for them while keeping this guy in sight.

"I'll get those for you," the guy said and kicked them under an SUV. "I'm

so clumsy today."

Owen took a step back and watched him. He couldn't tell what this guy wanted. If he was going to rob him, he was going about it in a weird way. That's when Dan appeared, breathless and mad.

"Keith, get the fuck away from him," he said, letting Owen know who they were dealing with.

"Is that you, Dan? I guess parking cars was too much like hard work for you. Selling your ass is more your thing," Keith said.

Dan only glared and said to Owen, "Let's go."

"My keys are under there," Owen told him. He moved to get them, but Dan stopped him.

"I'll do it," Dan said and got down to reach for them.

Right away, Owen knew why Dan didn't let him get the keys. He didn't want Owen on his knees in front of this guy.

"That's a familiar position for you, isn't it, Dan? Hands and knees," Keith said. "Bet you'd lick it up right off the ground. I think I have five bucks. Let's see."

Owen and Dan were on the same page. Nothing this guy said was worth a response. But then Keith moved. He took one step toward Dan, who had just grabbed the keys. That's when Owen slugged the asshole. The impact traveled up his arm, jarring and painful, but satisfying. Owen was dying to do that. Unfortunately, to the onlookers it seemed like he punched an innocent man for no reason. The cops saw it the same way. Fifteen minutes later, Owen found himself in handcuffs.

*

It was good to see Keith knocked on his ass, but everything that came after that was a nightmare. As Owen was read his rights, Dan's stomach knotted up sickeningly. His head was spinning. Owen was in handcuffs, under arrest because of him. This couldn't be happening.

"Just take care of the girls. Call Eve, tell her to call Justin. Everything is going to be fine," Owen reassured him. He could tell that Dan was about to have a meltdown.

Dan pulled himself together fast. He had to. Owen was counting on him. Dan remembered that Justin was one of Owen's friends and that he was a lawyer. He made the phone call to Eve then looked down at Owen's keys in his hand. When the police car pulled out with Owen in the back, Dan followed in Owen's car.

On arriving at the police station, Dan looked around frantically for Owen.

He saw him waiting. The arresting officer had stepped away to talk to another uniformed cop. Dan did a double take. The other cop was blond with pale blue eyes just like Keith's. Dan looked around for him. Keith was there too, scowling and watching the two cops talking. Dan wondered if the blond cop was his brother. Shit.

The arresting officer looked from Keith to Owen then nodded at the blond cop. Dan was horrified. Weren't things bad enough?

The next thing they knew, the cuffs were off, charges were being dropped and Owen was being released with a warning. They were both stunned.

"You make me sick! You're a fucking disgrace," Keith was yelling. He wasn't directing his words at Dan or Owen. He was speaking to his brother.

Keith's brother was stone faced. He said something to Keith under his breath and Keith stormed out.

"That must be his brother. I guess he was expecting him to take his side," Owen said.

"I was too," Dan said.

Instead, Keith's brother had looked ready to punch Keith himself.

"Why didn't Keith's brother take his side?" Dan wondered. It seemed impossible.

Owen offered a theory. "Because Keith is a psycho, and I guess his brother knows that."

Once they were outside, Owen stopped on the driver's side of his car. He shook his head from side to side like he was trying to clear it.

"I think you have to drive," he said to Dan in a voice he could barely hear.

Before he took the wheel, Dan squeezed Owen's left hand. For the first time, Dan was seeing the effects of what happened. Owen had stayed so calm until now.

"I almost ended up in jail. God, what would have happened to the girls?" Owen said.

"I'm sorry. This is my mess. I should have..."

Owen cut him off.

"No. Don't. Some guy harassing you is not your fault and neither is me punching him. I should have stayed in control. What the hell was I thinking?" Owen asked himself. His hand covered Dan's hand on the steering wheel. Owen's other hand was bruised and probably hurting.

Dan didn't answer him, but Owen had punched Keith because he saw him as a threat to Dan or because he said some ugly things about him. Mild mannered, coolheaded, upstanding citizen Owen had a bruised knuckle because of him. If Dan needed proof of how Owen felt about him, there

was exhibit A. But Dan didn't want that kind of proof.

*

On the drive home, Owen phoned Eve to tell her everything was OK. He also called off Justin. When the house came into view, Owen decided to sit in the car for a while. Eve said that the girls were in bed, but Owen still needed time to decompress. Looking up from where they were parked in front of the house, Owen thought about everything he had to lose.

"How is your hand?" Dan asked.

"Hurts."

Dan took his hand gently and looked it over.

"Now tell the truth. Did you hit him for making a threatening move or because of what he said?" Dan asked.

"Fifty/fifty," Owen admitted.

Dan was so wonderful, no one should dare to speak to him the way Keith did. Owen had seethed with rage. That step Keith took in Dan's direction might have been just the excuse Owen needed. Owen's feelings for Dan went beyond reason, beyond wanting and liking him. He would do anything for him and now he knew it. It was such a powerful, overwhelming feeling. If this was love then who invented this horrible, wonderful thing? Some fucking sadist, that's who.

Strangely enough, tonight had also proved to him again that Dan was someone he could lean on. He kept his cool though Owen could tell how upset he was. Dan was simply an amazing human being, who was now looking at Owen with worry.

"I'm OK."

"Are we OK?" Dan asked.

As far as Owen was concerned, nothing could come between them.

"You're perfect. I'm a little bruised and a lot stupid. And because of that asshole, I still owe you a second date," Owen told him and saw some of the worry leave Dan's face.

"I think you were right. Let's call any uninterrupted time together a date."

"You don't get off that easy," Owen told him. "Let's do this right."

"By the book it is," Dan said and leaned over to kiss him.

Owen's mouth opened as his eyes closed. He didn't know how much he needed this until he felt Dan's lips on his, his tongue probing gently.

"It's weird to date someone when you're a hundred percent sure you want to be with them," Dan said, ending the kiss.

"You're that sure?"

"More than sure," Dan said and gave him such an intense look that Owen was glad he was sitting or he would have been knocked over. The raw emotion he saw in Dan's eyes went straight to his heart.

"I hope I never disappoint you," Owen said. He felt happy and honored by Dan's faith in his feelings for him.

"Are you worried that we don't belong together? Because if we don't belong together, no one does," Dan said emphatically.

"I'm beyond worrying about that. I'm just waiting for that moment when everything clicks and I know where I'm meant to be. It happened when I moved in with Mom and the girls. One day I knew I was exactly where I was supposed to be, with the people I loved most. I can feel that moment coming again so you better be as sure as you say you are," Owen warned him.

"Damn. When you bring it, you don't kid around," Dan said with a happy grin. He inclined his head to look deep into Owen's eyes. "When that moment comes, I will be so ready for you."

This time Owen leaned in to kiss Dan. If Owen needed this close contact between them, then Dan did too. Owen wanted to give him everything he wanted and needed. For now, it was a tender kiss that deepened as Dan's arms went around him and Owen's tongue started to slide over his. This was everything, Owen thought as he was lost in that kiss. No matter what had happened tonight, Dan was worth it.

Chapter 13

Friday evening, Owen was showing a house to some busy clients. Later that night, Dan was planning on going to dinner with Antonio.

"I'll be back before your date with Antonio," Owen told him.

"You're not funny. You are the only guy I'm dating. But if you're not back in time, I'll just take the girls along. They can chaperone."

"I wouldn't wish that on poor Antonio. I'll make sure to get back," Owen said, showing more compassion for Antonio than Dan expected.

"Make up your mind. Are you jealous of Antonio or not?" Dan asked and got close to Owen to stare him down and press up against him.

"I think he's nuts," Owen said as he looked into Dan's challenging eyes and smiled. "He had a taste of you and he let you go. How could he do it?"

"I wasn't meant to be with him, and we both knew that. I was meant to be with someone else."

"Some boring, real estate guy with two kids."

"Yes. Him."

"I still can't believe you're interested in me," Owen said with a shake of his head.

Instead of being uninterested, Dan was ready to make every one of his filthy desires come to life.

"Interested doesn't cover how I feel," Dan told him. "I'm consumed, obsessed and crazy in love."

"Hey! You said the L word," Owen said, startled.

"Was I supposed to wait for the third date when we're still working our way up to the second one?" Dan asked him.

"At least. Now what you said is going to be ringing in my ears the whole day. How am I supposed to concentrate and talk about a whirlpool tub and an oversized marble shower?" Owen asked, frowning at Dan while his dark eyes gleamed.

He was so cute when he was flustered. Dan kissed him and sent him on his way.

Owen came back in plenty of time. They even had a chance to fool around a little before Antonio showed up. Standing on the doorstep when Dan opened the door, Antonio just shook his head at first.

"So you're really a manny," he said as Dan dragged him inside.

"You thought I was joking this whole time?" Dan asked. He had known about the job since Dan got it.

"It seemed more likely than you being a manny," Antonio said.

"Here's proof," Dan said as the girls ran over.

"These are your charges, huh?" Antonio said as the girls peered at him curiously.

"We're not charges. We're little girls," Connie corrected him. "We're Uncle Owen's nieces."

"We're nieces!" Maggie repeated like a little megaphone.

"So they're shy?" Antonio said.

"This is Connie, and this is Maggie. And this is the friend I'm going to have dinner with. His name is Antonio."

"Not another date, right?" Connie asked suspiciously.

"No. Just dinner."

"OK," she said.

"Does that run in the family?" Antonio asked once Connie and Maggie were gone.

"Jealousy? I think I'm more jealous than Owen," Dan said remembering his reaction when he visited Owen at work.

"I'm about to prove you wrong," Owen said from behind him.

"OK. I get it now," Antonio said as Dan introduced him to Owen. "And I'll take the jealousy as a compliment," he said to Owen.

"As you should," Owen told him.

Antonio had a great body and beautifully chiseled features. Despite that, Owen was perfectly nice to Antonio. Dan could only see the barest hint of jealousy. When it came down to it, Owen was a classy guy and he was all his. Feeling lucky to have him, Dan was smiling as he walked out with Antonio.

As they headed to Antonio's car, he stared at Dan with a scowl.

"What's this? This face you're making? Are you happy or something?" Antonio accused him.

"Mostly. Things with Owen are moving along. But Keith reared his ugly head," Dan told him. Thinking of the incident still made him feel sick.

"Keith? I thought he was done with you after he cost you that job," Antonio said as he got behind the wheel.

"I didn't want to keep parking cars that bad," Dan said to him.

"No. The other job at that flooring place, Solutions something?"

"Surface Solutions? What do you mean?" Dan asked.

"I ran into Samantha from the valet service right after I got here. She told me about it. Mr. Douglas gave you a good reference. You know how he is. But a day or two later, Samantha overheard Keith talking to someone about you from the phone in Douglas's office. He was saying that you were

suspected of stealing from people's cars. She told Douglas. He checked his calls. Keith was talking to someone at the flooring place about you. Mr. Douglas called them back to straighten it out, but it was too late. They already went with someone else."

Dan was speechless for a second.

"Shit. That's why they dumped me at the last minute. Why didn't Mr. Douglas let me know?"

"Probably didn't want to stir up trouble. Maybe he thought that was the end of it."

"Damn. Good thing I don't care about that job any more," Dan said though he didn't like to hear that Keith had gotten away with even more shit.

"Not with what you have going on with your current boss," Antonio needled him.

"Exactly. But Keith is still causing trouble. He almost got Owen arrested." Dan told him what happened when they ran into him.

"That guy is crazy. What are you supposed to do?" Antonio said.

"That's the same problem I had before. I have to have proof that he's done something illegal, and being an asshole and getting Owen to deck him isn't it."

"Did he come looking for you or...?"

"We just ran into him by accident. I think he only strikes when he sees an opportunity. He's not going to come chasing after me." That's what Dan was hoping anyway. That cop brother of his probably talked some sense into him.

Dan was back home after dinner. He went to Owen's office to talk to him, but Owen only wanted to tease him about Antonio.

"Did you rekindle any old feelings? Did any sparks fly during your dinner?" Owen asked, holding Dan by the waist.

"Not at dinner, but sparks are flying now," Dan told him.

"Are you sure? That Antonio is really good-looking," Owen persisted.

"Maybe I should be jealous of you and Antonio," Dan said, giving Owen a dirty look.

"Not while you look this good," Owen told him as his eyes traced a path down his body. "The girls are in bed. We're down here, and that door locks."

"You can't get enough of me."

"I want a taste of you," Owen said and got closer.

The tip of Owen's tongue parted his scowling lips. Dan let Owen kiss him

while he acted disinterested. He liked how tightly Owen held him as he kissed him lightly. Teasing him, he was trying to get Dan to respond. Of course Dan did. He couldn't hold out against the biggest temptation of his life. Their kiss started out soft. Then Owen increased the pressure of his lips and tongue while he squeezed Dan's ass. Turning the kiss hard and thorough, he made Dan shake inside with unfulfilled need. Owen pulled back and looked at Dan, proud of what he had done to him. Dan grinned enjoying the buzz of arousal even if he knew it wouldn't be satisfied any time soon. The girls had only just gone to bed. Owen nuzzled him and kissed his neck. Letting out a soft moan, he was letting Dan know that he had made himself horny too. Running his fingers through Owen's hair and down his back, Dan decided to ruin the mood.

"Now I have to tell you something about Keith."

Owen drew back, and his features clouded over. Dan told him what he found out from Antonio about Keith sabotaging him. Seeing Owen's face turn very grim, he reassured him. "That was a while ago. I just told you so you'll know I'm not keeping stuff from you even if it's unpleasant."

"I appreciate that. But if you see this guy, get the hell away from him. Please don't be brave," Owen begged him.

"Look who's talking. You punched his lights out."

"And that was stupid. Be smarter than me."

"Do as you say not as you do?"

"Exactly. An arrest could screw up your future."

"I'll play it smart. I promise." Dan didn't want Owen to worry. He gave him a kiss to seal his promise.

"I can't stand the thought of anything happening to you," Owen said.

"I know exactly how you feel," Dan told him. Seeing Owen in handcuffs was possibly the worst moment of his life.

Owen kissed him as if he wanted to make it up to him.

"I'm sorry I made you worry," Owen said.

"I can't blame you for being my hero."

They kissed again then broke apart quickly when they heard the girls on the stairs. They were probably sneaking down to make sure Dan was back, and Antonio hadn't stolen him away.

*

A few hours later, Owen heard a light knock on his bedroom door. When he opened it, Dan came in. It was past midnight. This late, Dan had to be there for either a very good or a very bad reason, or both.

"I just came down here to use your shower," Dan said.

"Oh, did you?" Owen didn't bother to ask him if the shower upstairs was broken.

"I hope that's OK," Dan said. He could almost pull off the innocent act. If only his pajama bottoms weren't tenting.

"So you just decided to take a midnight shower. And now you're stripping," Owen noticed.

Dan had pulled off his t-shirt in one swift motion that revealed his magnificent chest. Now he was bending over to pull down his pajamas and also to give Owen an enticing view. He was just sinfully gorgeous.

"I like to shower naked. Call me a perv," Dan said then went into the bathroom. Was Owen supposed to ignore his big, erect cock?

"Are we doing it in the shower?" Owen asked as he took off his own t-shirt and threw it on a chair.

"I'm showering. I don't know what you're talking about," Dan said as Owen followed him into the bathroom.

"This," Owen said. He took Dan's hand and put it on his bulging crotch covered only by his boxers.

"How did you get that?" Dan said, looking puzzled.

Owen decided to explain himself. "This guy barged into my room and took off all his clothes to show off his perfect body."

"The only perfect one is you," Dan said and grabbed him roughly to pull him close. Their erections met hard, grinding against each other.

"Strip. I want to scrub you down," Dan said as he started kissing Owen's chest and nibbling on his nipple. Owen panted and fumbled with his boxers.

Once the boxers were off and kicked away, Owen stepped into the shower.

"Are you going to lick me clean?" Owen asked. Though water was now running over them, Dan was still using his tongue to tease his nipples.

"I might," Dan told him as he licked his way down until he was on his knees in front of Owen.

Dan swiped the head of his cock with his tongue several times. Owen watched as his wet cock slipped into Dan's hot, sweet mouth. It felt so good, but it didn't last. Dan slid up his body making sure to maintain full contact. Naked and wet, skin to skin, Owen couldn't get enough of him. He was mesmerized by the movement of Dan's muscles as water ran over him in rivulets. Owen's tongue traced the outlines of his biceps as Dan threaded his fingers through his wet hair. Then Dan's mouth was on Owen's for a truly wet kiss.

Water ran over them as their tongues danced around each other. Owen stroked Dan's slippery, rock-hard cock with a light touch, barely any pressure. Cupping both cocks in his hand, Owen thrust his hips, letting his own cock slide over Dan's. As their cocks rubbed together, Owen knew what he really wanted. He ended the kiss and shut off the water.

Going into his bedroom, Owen got lube and condoms from his nightstand and dumped them on the bed. He hurriedly threw some towels over the bed then he kneeled on them still dripping wet. Offering himself, he waited for Dan. The first sensation Owen felt was Dan rubbing his thumb over his ass and down the crack. He gasped and panted.

"Tease!" he managed to get out.

Then he felt a slick finger entering him, and he shuddered and sighed. It was happening. Owen felt shaky with anticipation as his whole body screamed for Dan.

*

Just one finger inside Owen told Dan how tight he was. He felt the ring of muscle constricting around his finger and imagined what that would do to his cock. He groaned at the thought, and his cock got even stiffer. Dan added plenty of lube before pushing in a second finger. He felt Owen push back, panting for more. With even more lube, a third finger was pistoning in and out of Owen, but not easily. Owen's head had dropped to the bed and he was moaning.

"Stop. I don't want to come like that," Owen warned him between moans.

Fingering him was fun, but Dan wanted to fuck him so much. How could he wait when Owen was urging him on? Dan barely had any self-control left. This was what he had dreamed about.

Owen groaned at the initial pressure against his hole. He called Dan's name and clawed at the sheets. When Dan was in, Owen's back arched. The grip on Dan's cock was crushing. He could feel Owen breathing shakily. He could feel everything. Not daring to move, Dan moaned hoarsely and rubbed Owen's back still wet from the shower. He smoothed out the beads of water starting to mix with sweat.

Forehead on the mattress, Owen reached back with both hands. The muscles of his arms stood out as Owen took hold of Dan's hips and pulled him further in. Letting himself be guided, Dan moaned. He grabbed onto Owen's hips again and pushed in. Owen crossed his arms over his lowered head, put his weight back on his elbows and pushed back. Owen had no patience and Dan loved it. He felt his cock enveloped by an unbelievably

tight, hot grip. Sparks shot through his brain. Owen was amazing. He was panting as he rocked back into Dan. Moving inside him became only slightly easier, but Owen was enjoying it. His breathless moans were clear about that. Dan didn't know how much he could take. Being inside Owen felt too good. He gritted his teeth against the threatening orgasm.

"Don't you dare come yet," Owen told him as Dan pulled back.

"Then stop being awesome," Dan told him, but that was enough of a distraction to help him hold off his climax. He was back in with one solid shove, loving every inch of Owen as he tightened around him, trying to undo his hard won control.

Suddenly, Owen stopped him. He turned over on his back. His dark eyes locked on Dan's. As Dan took hold of his thighs, Owen's head fell back like he was offering his throat for him to kiss. Dan did just that and Owen moaned. He pulled Dan to him impatiently. Dan knew he needed him back inside, and Dan needed that too. He added lube and pushed back in. He held still, feeling Owen's hole pulse around him. He lifted Owen's legs running his hands up until he had a good grip on his ankles. The look in Owen's eyes was pure seduction as he said his name and grinned devilishly.

*

Dan held his legs firmly and pounded him hard. He was reaching so deep inside him with slow, steady thrusts. Owen's head swam as Dan's hips rolled, hitting him just right. His speed and power drove Owen to a state of mindless need.

Dan's name was only a low moan on his lips, but in his head it echoed loudly, expressing everything he felt. Dan was everything. He was his whole world as Owen lost himself and all sense of time and place. He only saw Dan above him. He was so beautiful. As he gripped his legs hard, every muscle of Dan's body was sculpted rock hard with effort.

Owen felt his own body stiffen, tightening around Dan. Dan was coming too just as a shattering orgasm almost made Owen scream out. The scream was silenced by Dan's mouth on his.

Once he spent himself in Owen, Dan collapsed. His legs gave out and he tried to roll to the side so he wouldn't drop on top of Owen. Owen didn't allow that. He wrapped his arms and legs around Dan and pulled him down to him. Dan laughed at him, but he wasn't going anywhere.

Owen had released his death grip on Dan to let him breathe and cool off. They were side by side, hand in hand with fingers entwined. Owen didn't

realize he had fallen asleep until Dan brought his hand to his lips and kissed it. Then he let go. Dan swung his legs off the bed, and Owen raised his head in alarm. He let his head drop back on the pillow with a sigh. Of course Dan had to go back to his own room, damn it. Dan put on his pajama bottoms and threw his t-shirt over his shoulder as he left. Owen stared after him with heavy regret that he couldn't ask him to stay.

Once he was alone, Owen turned restlessly. His bed was too big just for him. He needed Dan next to him, pressed against him so he could sleep. The distance between them was almost physically painful to him now. It was unbearable not to have Dan in his bed. How was he supposed to sleep when a half naked, hot guy was roaming his hallways at all hours of the night?

When Owen finally fell asleep, Dan roamed his dreams. He came into his room, leaned over him, uncovered him, kissed him and fucked him. It was the most exhausting sleep of his life.

Chapter 14

Saturday, Dan had cleared the breakfast dishes and sent the girls upstairs to brush their teeth. Owen was on the phone. Dan gave him a quick kiss and went upstairs. As soon as Dan got into his room to grab his laptop, Maggie came running to him.

"Daaaan! Connie doesn't like me!" she said.

"What do you mean? Of course she likes you."

"She yelled at me and called me clumsy," Maggie said with a pout.

"Everyone is clumsy sometimes," Dan told her.

"She was mean. I knocked down the little cactus. Connie said it's gonna die," she said worriedly.

"A cactus is pretty strong. I don't think it will die," Dan told her.

"It was a present from Grandma."

"That's nice. Did you get one?"

"No. I'm too little. I got kitty slippers," she said then she ran off suddenly to go get them and show them to him. She put them on her feet proudly.

"Your grandma must love you a lot," Dan said.

"She does!" she agreed loudly.

"Let's go and see how that cactus is doing?" Dan said and offered her his hand.

They went back to the girls' room. Seeing Connie's concerned face as she fussing with the cactus on her nightstand, Dan assured her, "It's not going to die, Connie."

"Are you sure?" she asked.

"I promise. It won't die." He knew that she was so worried about the cactus because it was a gift from her grandmother.

"OK," she said, but then she glared at Maggie, who stuck out her tongue at her.

"Come on, guys, make up. You say you're sorry," he said to Maggie. "And you accept her apology," he said to Connie.

"You first," Maggie said to her sister.

"That's not how an apology works," Dan told her. "Say you're sorry for knocking down the cactus."

"But it was an accident."

"You have to apologize for accidents too," Dan explained.

Maggie went up to the cactus and said, "Sorry I knocked you down."

Dan waited to see if Connie would accept this apology. She did.

"Your turn," Dan prompted her. "Say you're sorry for yelling and calling Maggie clumsy."

"Sorry I called you clumsy. Stop being so clumsy," Connie said.

Maggie accepted her version of an apology by sticking out her tongue again. Connie stuck out her tongue too. Dan considered the matter settled so he went downstairs and poked his head into Owen's office. He didn't look too busy now.

"Is Maggie old enough to have a cactus?" Dan asked while Owen looked over some real estate listings.

"How old does she need to be?"

"Your mother gave a cactus to Connie but not to Maggie. She said she wasn't old enough. I wanted to get her one," Dan told him.

"Just Maggie?"

"If I get one for Connie too, she'll have two."

"That's no good. Don't buy them stuff. You're just asking for trouble," Owen warned him.

"I'd like to. I'll get something different for Connie. That's what your mom did. I think I saw the little cacti at the discount store."

That afternoon, after picking up the girls from a play date, Dan took them to the discount store. The tiny cactus plants were exactly where Dan remembered seeing them. Domed and furry, they were about the size of golf balls. Though they all looked pretty much the same to Dan, Maggie was taking forever trying to choose one.

"I don't know," she said with a sigh as she looked them over.

"Yeah, it's a tough decision," Dan told her.

She nodded gravely. She did choose one eventually, and Connie had no trouble picking what she wanted.

Owen was in the kitchen, making dinner when Dan and the girls got home. The girls ran straight to him to brag and complain.

"Dan got us presents. You didn't get us any presents," Connie complained.

"Yeah," Maggie agreed.

"I knew you were starting trouble," Owen said to Dan who just shrugged. "I'm making you dinner. Now let's see these great presents Dan got you," Owen said to the girls.

They came closer to show him their gifts. The cactus in a little plastic pot was just like Connie's but smaller. It was obvious from the way Maggie was holding it that she treasured it.

"Wow, it's really nice," Owen told her.

Maggie beamed at him. Then Connie unfolded her gift. Connie's gift was

a "#1 Grandma" t-shirt in a woman's size. Owen looked at Dan.

"It's because Connie has the best grandma," Dan explained.

"Grandma's number one!" Connie agreed.

"She can sleep in it," Dan said with a shrug.

"Connie and Maggie can both sleep in it," Owen said. It was certainly big enough.

"No. It's just for me," Connie objected.

"I have a cactus," Maggie said, holding it up high.

Owen waited till the girls were gone to ask Dan, "Does she know that the t-shirt is for grandmothers to wear?"

"I don't know, but I'm not going to tell her. It's what she picked, and it made her happy."

"It's nice. I'll take a picture of her wearing it to send to Mom," Owen said. "Oh, we're invited to a fishing cabin tomorrow. It's Eve's grandfather's. It doesn't get used much so Eve goes out there to check on it every few weeks. We go with her sometimes, take a picnic lunch."

"Sounds good," Dan said. When Owen turned back to the stove, Dan wrapped his arms around him from behind. Spreading his hands over his chest, Dan kissed the back of his neck.

Owen made a weak, complaining noise, but then he turned his head so Dan could kiss his mouth.

"You're such a good boyfriend," Dan told him.

"A what?" Owen gasped. Dan could feel him holding his breath then starting to breathe hard.

"You need me to define boyfriend?" Dan whispered in his ear. "A guy I can't live without, who drives me crazy, and makes me hard, and makes me dinner."

Owen stayed turned away. With his arms around him, Dan felt his heart beating harder and faster. But he had to lean over to catch sight of Owen's bright, tearful eyes and his shaky smile. They told Dan everything he needed to hear about how Owen felt about being called his boyfriend. Dan kissed his shoulder and held him tight. He wanted to show him, "This is us. We are stronger together and nothing can separate us."

Early Sunday morning, Dan was helping the girls get ready for the day at the fishing cabin.

"We can't wear anything too nice. We always get dirty when we go to the fish house," Connie said to Maggie as she picked what she wanted to wear.

Maggie nodded in agreement, but said no to every piece of clothing Connie suggested. When Dan offered her the same outfit she had just

rejected, Maggie put it on happily.

Dan got jackets for the girls while they were more concerned with choosing which hats to wear. He wasn't sure what to expect of their outing to a fishing cabin, of all places, but as long as he got to spend time with Owen, he was up for anything.

It was a warm day with only wispy, white clouds smudging the blue sky. The drive was pleasant, but the back of the car wasn't quiet even for an instant. Owen did his impression of a grouchy uncle as the girls bickered, laughed and exclaimed over what they saw out the window. He was such a faker. For a guy who grumbled about what terrors the girls were, Owen never really got irritated with them. He was actually pretty easygoing. Dan gazed at his profile as long as he dared. He didn't want the girls to notice that he was head over heels in love with their uncle.

The highway was surrounded by evergreens, but once they turned into a country lane, the roadside was overgrown with tall bushes and smaller trees with leaves just starting to yellow. The paved road ended at an intersection next to a gas station. They followed a dirt road curving among thick brush until they came across a clear view of the river for the last stretch. The river was wide and as calm as a lake.

When they arrived at the fishing cabin, Eve was already there. As soon as they were unbuckled, the girls jumped out of the car and ran to her. Eve did a complicated high five routine that made the girls giggle as they tried to keep up.

Getting out of the car, Dan took a look around. On the drive there he had seen that the banks of the river were steep and unapproachable upstream. Trees grew right up to the water's edge, leaning over the slow moving water. Here, the landscape was different. The ground was bare. The river spread out here, marshy with muddy banks. Across the water, a thick growth of trees and bushes combined into a mass of green with only hints of yellow and orange. Only the tallest trees stood out, rising above the rest to show themselves against the blue sky.

"No splashing in the mud," Owen warned the girls as they approached the edge of the river.

The day was pretty warm with a nice breeze, a clear sky and no threat of rain. Good thing since their only shelter looked pretty uninviting. About thirty yards from the water, the fishing cabin looked just like a very small, gray house on stilts.

"The river overflows sometimes," Eve said as they went up the stairs to

the deep, high porch.

Eve unlocked the door and grabbed some folding chairs that were just inside. Owen took them from her and unfolded them. Poking his head into the cabin as Eve opened the wooden shutters on the windows, Dan looked around.

Wood was everywhere making up the walls and the floor. The walls were covered with posters, prints and paintings of boats, fish and men fishing. Fishing poles were mounted high on the walls. A checkered couch and a brown recliner were the main pieces of furniture along with a big, wooden chest that served as a coffee table. Going in, Dan saw that it was a one room cabin with a rudimentary bathroom. The kitchen had a sink and one open shelf where a pot, a pan and some dishes were stacked next to canned foods. Eve told him that the wood stove was both for heat and cooking. She showed him that the wooden chest held lanterns and blankets. Dan added it all up to mean that the cabin had no electricity.

Considering what the place had to offer, Dan wasn't surprised that the girls came in for about a second then went back out. Owen only came in to stash the coolers with their food and drinks.

They didn't stay around there long. To give Dan a better look at the scenery, they hiked up some rough trails over small hills. From there, they got a nice, long view of the river. It was wide and lazy as it traveled between banks crowded with vegetation. The girls had their cameras hanging around their necks. They took pictures, sometimes at the same time when Owen was taking pictures of them. Dan and Owen walked together while the girls treated Eve like she was one of them.

At one point Dan overheard Maggie say to Eve, "Uncle Owen is smiling all the time."

"That's because of Dan," Connie said wisely.

Dan and Owen looked at each other, wondering how much she knew.

"How is Dan doing it?" Maggie wanted to know.

Eve looked over at the guys wickedly while they held their breaths.

Connie had a perfectly innocent answer. "Because he's Dan."

"Dan, the man!" Maggie yelled and Connie agreed with a nod.

"They're so right," Owen whispered to Dan.

That just gave Eve an excuse to wiggle her eyebrows at them.

"You better watch it. The girls can see right through you guys," she said as the girls walked ahead of them far enough to be out of earshot.

"It's Dan's fault. He said the B word," Owen said and gave Dan a look that was both accusing and happy.

"Sorry, but you can't blame him. You are kind of a bitch," Eve said.

Dan was pretty sure that she knew that wasn't the word Owen was talking about.

"Boyfriend," Owen hissed at her, making sure the girls couldn't hear.

"I guess that wasn't the first thing that came to mind," she said with a shrug. Then she punched Owen's arm lightly. "Kidding. You are the most beautiful couple I've ever seen."

Owen looked at her wryly.

"I can see you don't believe I'm sincere, but I'll prove I mean it later on," she promised cryptically and walked faster to join the girls.

Following another trail, they went through woods that looked like they had been there forever. Gnarly, old trees were covered in creepers. The shaggy treetops let in sunlight in patches. These scraps of sunbeams looked both solid and unreal within the cool darkness of the forest. The girls found the place mysterious and ripe for adventure. Owen had printed up a map for the girls and marked a random spot with a red X. The girls pretended to be following the map, looking for treasure.

"We do the treasure hunt every time we come here," Owen said.

"What happens when they don't find any treasure?" Dan wanted to know.

"They'll find something and call it a treasure," Owen said confidently.

Eventually, they came out of the wilderness and walked next to the road that led back to the cabin. They saw ramshackle houses and other fishing cabins along the way. Whenever they saw people, the girls waved. Almost everyone waved back, and some of the older men tipped their caps to them.

They were back at the cabin just in time for lunch. On their treasure hunt, the girls had found a piece of wood in the shape of the letter M. Maggie decided that was the treasure even if Connie disagreed.

After lunch, the adults sat on the porch and watched Maggie and Connie playing. Maggie was running around with arms out like a little airplane. Armed with a stick that had a string hanging from it, Connie was chasing her. Maybe Maggie was supposed to be a fish.

"Ugh, they're too energetic. They kill me," Owen said as he slumped lower in the folding chair so that his long legs almost reached the edge of the porch.

"Don't sound like such an old man," Dan told him.

"I will fire you so fast," Owen said, but Dan knew an empty threat when he heard one.

"And be left alone with them?"

"Fine," Owen capitulated. "Go ahead and insult me."

Dan leaned over and kissed him instead.

"The girls didn't see that, but I did," Eve told them. She had been texting and now she told them the result. "Lou and Moira will be home in a few hours. Save it until then."

Dan didn't know what that meant. Eve explained that Lou and Moira were friends of hers with a house an hour away from there. They had kids, dogs, and ducks so taking the girls over there for a visit was mandatory.

"Me and the girls will be gone a minimum of two, three hours," she informed them then pointed back inside the cabin. "As you know, that is an extremely manly space. Use it accordingly."

"How lucky can one man get?" Dan said to Owen. "You have an awesome friend like Eve, and you are getting banged by me later."

Owen glared at him even though he had whispered the last part in his ear.

Chapter 15

Owen hadn't expected the opportunity to be alone with Dan. Too bad they had to wait a few hours. It did give Owen a chance to get some things from his car. Just because he wasn't expecting any action didn't mean he wasn't prepared. As they waited, the anticipation made him tingle all over. He was afraid to meet Dan's eyes. Waiting would become unbearable under that sexy gaze.

Owen and Dan stood on the porch and waved at the girls as Eve's car pulled away. As soon as they were out of sight, Dan launched himself at Owen. Pressing himself against Owen, grabbing his ass, he pushed him backwards into the cabin and locked the door.

Owen found himself against the back of the couch, legs apart so Dan could fit between them. Dan lunged for him, taking Owen's mouth with his own. His kiss was hot and fierce, making Owen instantly hard. Pulling back, Dan looked down Owen's body. Dan's chest was heaving. His breath was ragged in Owen's ears as Dan stripped him roughly. Owen's pulse was racing. His heart hammered against his ribcage. Once Dan had him naked, Owen pulled off his clothes hurriedly. His hungry gaze roamed Dan's naked body, but looking wasn't enough.

It was Owen's turn to get aggressive. He pushed Dan backwards until they were on the other side of the couch. Letting lube and condoms drop from his hand to Dan's, Owen got on his back. Dan was on him in an instant, kissing his neck, his shoulders, pinching his nipples before he licked them. Taking a detour to kiss his mouth, Dan worked his way down his chest and abs to his cock. Owen let out a guttural moan as Dan took the rock hard length of it in his mouth in one tight motion. He pulled back to give the head of his cock a few licks and swirls as his fist pumped the rest.

"Get to the main event. I'm dying for it," Owen gasped.

"Anything to please," Dan said. He leaned down to kiss Owen before he started lubing and fingering him.

Owen couldn't take it for long. He said enough before Dan wanted to stop.

"You're too tight," Dan said.

"No such thing," Owen assured him.

Dan’s eyes were fiery. He wanted to fuck as much as Owen did. Lifting Owen's legs high, he got into position. Owen did too. He pulled his legs to his chest and breathed hard waiting for Dan with eyes hooded, biting his lip. He was almost in a trance of anticipated pleasure. Then there it was –

the wonderful pressure, the thickness of Dan's cock demanding entrance.

Though Owen was desperate to have Dan's cock inside him, it wasn't that easy. Dan had to put some muscle behind it. Good thing Dan had muscle to spare. Owen moaned as Dan's cock opened him up. Dan was grunting with effort, starting to sweat. It paid off as Owen felt Dan's cock going deeper, stretching him to the limit. Impatient for all of it, he gritted his teeth. When Dan was all the way in, Owen whimpered with relief. He had him. He had all of him. What came after was slow and dizzying. Pleasure multiplied over and over as Dan kept to an agonizing rhythm that felt like it would never end, just drive Owen out of his mind for an eternity.

"I can't take this." Owen's voice was only a raspy whisper.

"I'm loving you," Dan said with a smile and shuddered as he thrust in again.

"Love me harder," Owen demanded. He couldn't endure the slow, loving torture. And he wanted Dan's cock to make him come, not his own hand.

"But I want it to last forever," Dan said breathlessly.

"Forever is a long time to wait to come."

"Why did I think you would be patient and sweet?" Dan asked, leaning over him and touching his forehead to Owen's.

"I have no idea. Now pound me senseless."

"OK, but you better hang on to something."

Owen grabbed Dan's ass. Dan started pumping faster and faster, slamming in just the way Owen wanted. Shaking, struggling to breathe and not to come yet, Owen moaned louder all the time. Under that furious pounding, it was impossible not to come. He felt swept away by some irresistible force. The orgasm screamed through him, sharp and searing, making him cry out as his body went rigid in Dan's arms. He collapsed breathless and shuddering. Watching Dan come, Owen felt the surge of it inside him and heard his guttural yell. Dan was still moaning hoarsely as Owen pulled him down. Welcoming the full weight of his muscles on top of him, Owen kissed him.

*

From their first fuck, Dan remembered that Owen was always eager for more. He was a bad influence and an irresistible temptation. As Dan first entered him, raw pleasure coursed through his whole being. Dan loved that Owen was so tight for him. The unbelievable pleasure drove him on recklessly, but Dan didn't let his desire for Owen rush him. He wanted control. He wanted Owen to feel his love. Dan wasn't just trying to be a

gentleman, he wanted to prove himself, and fuck him on and on, endlessly. He loved watching Owen's face as he sank into him, his intense expression, the tight jaw and the passion in his eyes as Dan plunged deep inside.

The feral bliss as Owen came sent Dan into an oblivion of pleasure. It was followed by lazy kisses and Owen caressing him. Owen's movements slowed and his breathing evened out. Dan could feel it as he rested with his head on his chest. He raised his head.

"You don't have time to sleep," Dan told him when Owen's eyes stayed closed too long.

"Leave the dead to rest in peace."

"I can bring you back to life and exhaust you all over again," Dan promised him.

"Don't you have any pity?"

"No, I just have the libido of a much younger man."

"Much younger?" Owen said, coming fully awake now.

"Now that you're awake, you can prove to me that you've still got it." Dan straddled him and started to put a condom on Owen.

"Like that? Really?" Owen said.

"I have needs."

While Dan lubed himself and Owen's cock, Owen grinned at him like a hungry wolf.

"I see you have needs too," Dan said to him and leaned down to kiss him.

"A need to fuck you. Yes. I just didn't want to rush it."

Dan lowered himself carefully at first. As his cock penetrated, Owen's eyelids fluttered and he groaned. Dan wanted to see more of that. He pushed down harder and watched Owen's eyes snap open. Dan was squeezing him pretty good. Owen gripped his thighs, but Dan didn't let that slow him down. He felt the familiar ache and the deep satisfaction as he let himself drop all the way onto Owen's cock. The sensation punched the air right out of him. He gulped as Owen glared at him but also moaned as his cock was gripped.

Dan picked up speed gradually while Owen stroked his cock. A jolt of pleasure shot up into him each time he let himself press down all the way so that Owen filled him completely. The feeling spiraled upward until it spiked and became unbearable. Dan felt himself unraveling. His riding got erratic. He only managed to keep to a good rhythm by letting Owen's hands guide him over his cock. He was losing it. His climax exploded like lightning and thunder shooting right up his spine, making him wild, nearly screaming out his orgasm like an animal. Pulsing come all over Owen's chest, he took pride in making Owen come just as hard. Leaning down,

Dan licked Owen's chest clean as Owen breathed raggedly and moaned. When he was done, Dan made contented noises into Owen's hair as Owen held him in his arms and kissed his neck tenderly.

On top of each other was the only way they could fit on the couch. Dan was resting his head on Owen's shoulder. As Owen's hands caressed him, Dan tried not to fall asleep.

"If I love you, should I tell you or...?" Owen started to ask playfully.

"No, keep it to yourself," Dan said. He raised his head to glare at Owen until he kissed him.

"I can't keep it to myself. I love you too much," Owen said to redeem himself.

"Just shorten that to I love you. There's no such thing as too much," Dan told him, not letting him off the hook until he got a pure I love you that reached him straight from Owen's heart.

"Fine. I love you." As Owen said it, his eyes were gleaming and beautiful.

"God, I love you too," Dan said to him. He grabbed him and kissed him deeply. "And thanks for telling me," he said once he came up for air.

"Thanks?" Owen made a face, not understanding his gratitude.

Dan explained himself. "I know you don't like to act crazy or rush into anything. I thought I would have to wait for that illusive third date or something."

"Dating is hard. Let's just screw around," Owen said.

"No. You owe me an Owen Wakefield experience," Dan told him.

"You're living it."

"And loving it," Dan said. "I didn't think this was ever going to happen."

"You didn't think you stood a chance, but you still came after me? You're a brave man," Owen said as he looked into his eyes.

"I had to take a shot. I was starting to see that I was never going to be happy without you. I've been wanting you so long," Dan said with both anguish and love.

Owen kissed him hard, answering every longing and need Dan had inside him.

"Text from Eve," Owen announced. "They're on their way back. ETA fifteen minutes."

They were getting dressed and making sure the cabin was in order.

"You want to tell me why we can't do this all the time," Dan wanted to know.

"Because it's dangerous. Too much sex leads to bad things." Owen's crazy

words were garbled by Dan's kisses.

"Let's try it and see," Dan said. He didn't want to be away from Owen even for an instant.

"My life is chaotic and challenging enough," Owen said, not ready for any big steps yet.

"I'm not a tornado," Dan said.

"You kind of are." Owen ran his hands down his body. He looked like he was reliving what just happened between them.

"You mean in the sack?" Dan said, fishing for a compliment.

"Yes, and don't act like you don't know you're dynamite in bed."

"Tell me more."

"Not now. I have to turn back into a decent-thinking family man."

"Then I better turn into the upstanding, clean-living manny," Dan said and pulled in Owen so they could indulge in one last kiss. The kiss was soft but not clean or decent. Every contact between them blazed with the fire burning in their hearts.

Chapter 16

Next Sunday, Owen was busy showing a house so Dan brought Connie and Maggie with him to visit his great-grandmother. When they got back, he took the girls to the real estate office so they could pick up Owen and all four of them could do something together.

Going in, the girls peered around the office then at Dan, wondering where Owen was. They all went over to Simon. He was busy flirting with Brad. Dan wondered if Brad was angling for a job there, or if he maybe had a thing for Simon.

"I thought Owen was supposed to be here. That's why we dropped by," Dan said to Simon.

"I guess he's running late. Brad is waiting for him too," Simon said.

Since Owen wasn't there, the girls made a beeline for the receptionist, Brenda. She had a baby a few months ago, and the girls wanted to see baby pictures.

Just as Dan was about to text Owen, Brad came up to him and looked him up and down.

"I can't believe Wakefield passed you up for that guy. That's a terrible lapse in judgment. He usually knows a hot property when he sees one."

"What guy?" Dan asked, instantly ready to get jealous.

"Didn't get a name," Brad said.

"Whose name?" Dan wanted to know.

"Owen's new boyfriend."

"I'm his new boyfriend," Dan asserted.

"You sure about that?" Brad said with a frozen smile. He was looking a little panicky about the turn the conversation was taking.

"Positive," Dan told him. "Tell me about this guy."

Thinking that he had already put his foot in it, Brad didn't want to say any more. He tried to make some kind of excuse and escape, but Dan didn't let him.

"Owen wouldn't cheat on me. This is something else," Dan said. He didn't know what, but he knew without a doubt that Owen had no other boyfriend but him. He insisted that Brad tell him who the other guy was.

Brad sighed then told him, "This guy said he was Owen's boyfriend. It was a few days ago. I had some clients take a look at the house on Lakeview Lane that Owen was showing. I was waiting for my clients in front when I spotted a guy parked on the street. He looked kind of suspicious so I went over and asked if he was waiting for someone. He said he was waiting for Owen, that he was his boyfriend. I was dying to ask

Owen about him, but I never got the chance."

"Describe this guy."

"Young, very blond, wearing sunglasses, good body, close-cropped hair. Drove an old black Dodge."

Without saying anything, Dan stepped away and tried to call Owen. He got no answer. Dan left several texts and messages so Owen would know to call him back right now. He went to ask Simon when he was last in touch with him.

"I've been trying to reach him. I just figured he was busy," Simon said.

"Where is Owen right now?" Dan asked.

"I'm not sure. I know he was stopping at a house in Banyan Heights then coming here."

"I need the address."

Simon gave him a printout that had the address, directions and a map. It wasn't far. As he started to leave, Dan considered calling the police. And telling them what? That his boyfriend was a few minutes late. Dan looked over at the girls. Connie and Maggie were still busy looking at pictures of Brenda's baby. Dan told the girls to stay there and asked Brenda to watch them. Seeing him run out, the girls looked worried. Dan wished he had time to reassure them, but he didn't know what to say. He didn't know what was going on. Just because that guy sounded like Keith... Dan pushed everything out of his mind and concentrated on getting in the car and driving as fast as he could without crashing. Once he saw for himself that Owen was OK, he could breathe again. Until then all that mattered was getting there.

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The house in Banyan Heights was built lovingly and it showed in design, material and craftsmanship. It was modern, but it had warmth. The deck overlooked a small nature preserve. Light streamed in through the big windows and glass doors. Owen hoped his cell phone video would do it justice. An out of state client looking for a house in the area wanted to see the video right away so it would have to do.

Owen had gone through most of the house, shooting video and talking about the features of the place. He made sure to mention how well it had been maintained by the previous owners. Having covered everything, he didn't have much left to say but continued recording and let the house speak for itself. He wanted another shot of the view through the high window from the top of the stairs. As he got downstairs, he was almost

done. That's when he saw someone on the video. A man was moving on the deck outside. When Owen looked up from the screen, something smashed through the glass doors and his phone flew out of his hand.

Next thing he knew, Owen was tackled. The back of his head hit the floor. For a second he saw only red, and he had to fight to stay conscious. A fist slammed into him hard then again. How many blows before he passed out? That couldn't happen. He had to fight back.

The face above him was a blur obscured by fists. Owen realized it was Keith. The insults he spewed were only static between the blows. Owen focused on not passing out and gathering enough strength to throw him off and get to his feet. He saw his chance when Keith all of a sudden got lighter and stopped hitting him. Owen kicked him off. That's when he saw Dan punching Keith. That's what had made Keith lighter. The next punch from Dan knocked him out.

Dazed, Owen watched as Dan dragged away the unconscious Keith like the sack of shit that he was. Dan took off his belt and tied Keith's wrists to the lowest picket of the stairway. As Owen struggled to get to his feet, Dan rushed over to him.

The first thing Owen told him was, "I'm OK." The look on Dan's face was so anguished. Owen would have done anything to take away the pain he saw there. He reached up and touched Dan's cheek. "Don't worry about me."

Dan smiled while looking like he was going to cry. "You must be OK if you're worrying about me worrying."

Owen almost laughed, but he hurt too much for that. He did manage to stand up with Dan's help. Dan held him so gently. Owen could feel love from every fiber of his being. He had never loved Dan more.

*

As he drove over, breaking the speed limit, Dan had tried to convince himself that he was overreacting. He drove recklessly and ploughed to a stop in front of the house where he saw Owen's Subaru. As Dan jumped out of the car, he caught a glimpse of an older, black car parked down the road. He still hoped he was wrong as he ran up the path to the house. The smashed glass door was all Dan needed to see to convince him he had been right to worry. He rushed in.

He could have killed Keith for every drop of blood he saw on Owen's face. Keith owed his life to Owen. Dan loved Owen more than he could ever hate anyone. Instead of beating the shit out of Keith, he would take

care of Owen and make sure nothing ever took him away.

While Dan got on the phone to call the police, he couldn't take his eyes off Keith. He saw his eyes blink. He was coming to. Keith was conscious but subdued as Dan talked to the 911 operator.

"You're going to jail. Your brother won't be able to get you out of this," Dan told him when he got off the phone.

"I don't need him. I'll just tell them you two lured me here and assaulted me," Keith said. His words were slurred by the damage Dan's fists had done to him. His teeth were bloody as he sneered.

Owen could see that Dan was furious and placed his hand on Dan's arm lightly. Dan wanted to hurt Keith, but with Owen's calming touch, he held himself in check.

Then Owen turned and looked around for something. He staggered over to his phone. It was on the floor, not too far from the action.

Owen held up his cell phone. "I was shooting some video of the house for an out of state client. It's still recording," he said to Dan. He aimed the phone at Keith. "Have anything else to say?"

"Maybe you want to talk about stealing Mr. Douglas's credit card or what you did to my tires," Dan said.

"Your car is a piece of shit anyway," Keith said.

Dan wasn't sure if that counted as a confession, but it sure sounded like Keith was responsible for the damage to his tires. Even if nothing else could be proved, this time he had gone too far. He was finished.

Soon the paramedics were tending to Owen. He would have to get checked out at the hospital, especially his head. Dan still couldn't breathe easy. At least the police were done asking him questions for now. They were lifting the prints off the metal recliner Keith had thrown through the glass door. The cell phone video had caught him just as he swung it. The cops were looking at it as they listened to Keith's version of what happened. His story didn't exactly match the facts.

Dan watched worriedly as Keith's brother arrived. Last time his interference helped them, but Dan didn't know what to expect from him this time. Out of uniform, Keith's brother stood off to the side, looking grim. Keith stared daggers at him. Dan saw real hate there. When Keith's brother approached them a little later, Dan and Owen found out why.

He introduced himself as Derrick Mitchum and told them about Keith.

"Keith was always homophobic, but it kicked into high gear when he found out I was gay. I'm sorry he took it out on you. I'd rather he went after

his real target."

"If you knew he was violent..." Dan started to say.

"He never did anything like this. He was all talk until now," Derrick said with distaste.

Dan couldn't really blame him. Dan didn't know Keith was capable of this either, or he would have never allowed Owen out of his sight.

As they were waiting for Owen's test results at the hospital, Dan watched bruises appear on Owen's face.

"Thank you for coming to save me," Owen told him instead of telling him not to worry for the hundredth time.

"Thank Brad," Dan told him. "He mistook Keith for your boyfriend and told me all about him."

"In that case, I'll have to kick Brad's ass for thinking I have such terrible taste in men," Owen said with a disgusted look.

"We should thank your client for making you shoot that video," Dan said. Without it, who knows what the police might have believed.

"This is turning into an Oscar acceptance speech," Owen said. "We can't leave out Connie and Maggie. I got that sturdy case for my phone because of the girls. They are always knocking my phone down. I don't know how many times I've heard 'Crash! Woops! Sorry!'"

"Is that everyone we need to thank?" Dan said, but thinking of the girls and what almost happened to Owen scared him so much. Looking at Owen's bruised face, he started to worry about how they would react.

It was well into the afternoon by the time Dan took Owen home. Eve and Justin had gone to get the girls from the real estate office. Justin was on standby in case any charges were filed against Owen or Dan. Plus he had a tiny dog and a million pictures and videos of him. The girls were still squealing over them when Owen and Dan arrived home. Eve had tried to prepare the girls for seeing Owen's injuries, but they were still upset.

"Should I get your doctor's coat, Dr. Connie?" Dan asked.

Maggie demanded one too. Wearing two of Owen's white shirts with the sleeves rolled way up, the girls consulted over Owen as he stretched out on the couch. They scribbled in some notebooks and nodded at each other a lot.

That gave Dan a chance to talk to Justin and Eve about what happened. Justin promised to keep an eye on the case against Keith. After making sure that Owen and Dan had everything they needed, Eve and Justin left.

Dan watched the girls as they argued about whether Owen needed shots.

Maggie was against it. Thinking it was right up their alley, Dan told the girls not to let Owen sleep. The doctor had warned them about the possibility of a concussion.

"That doesn't mean you should constantly poke him with your pencils," Dan told them when he saw how they were keeping him awake.

"Or at least use the eraser side," Owen grumbled.

The girls also ran back and forth with new ice packs. While they were in the kitchen getting two fresh ones, Dan sat down next to Owen on the couch.

"You'll be looking pretty in no time," Dan assured him. "Until then I'll think up some more ways to distract the girls from your scary face."

"I know how to distract them," Owen said. When the girls came back, he had them sit down.

"I have some news. Dan is my boyfriend," Owen said, surprising Dan and the girls too.

The girls jumped up. Staring at Owen and Dan in confusion, they didn't know what to do. Maggie was the first to cheer excitedly. When Connie recovered, she came over to Dan. She stared hard at him then she frowned at Owen.

"Are you mad?" Owen asked her while Maggie climbed on Dan's lap.

"No. You need a boyfriend, and now Dan won't go on any more dates, right?" Connie said, looking from Owen to Dan.

"He'll still go on dates with me," Owen told her.

"Can we come?" Maggie asked.

"It's not a date if you come," Owen told her.

"What do we get out of it?" Maggie wanted to know. She hugged Dan possessively.

"It's OK. Uncle Owen is not taking him away. Dan is still our manny," Connie reassured her.

"That's right," Dan confirmed it.

When the girls scampered away, Dan leaned down and very gingerly kissed Owen.

"Using me as a distraction again?" Dan said.

"It's the main reason I hired you. You are so distracting you could stop traffic."

"Glad to be of help. Are you going to take some time off?"

"I have to or I'll scare the clients."

"Good. I want to take care of you," Dan told him.

"Get in line," Owen said as the girls came back with teddy bears for him to borrow until he felt better. He tried to tell them that he didn't need the

bears because he had Dan, but they wouldn't hear of it.

That night, Dan stayed up with Owen. He hated to keep him awake when he was so tired. Owen was in his bed, and Dan was sitting next to him.

"Sorry I can't let you sleep," Dan said.

"I don't mind staying awake as long as I get to look at you," Owen told him.

As for Dan, he wasn't sure he could ever again take his eyes off Owen. He was amazed at how strong Owen was. He had a cut lip, a black eye and other bruises, but he looked so peaceful as he gazed at Dan.

"You aren't putting on a brave face for me, are you?" Dan had to ask.

"No. The more you have, the more you have to lose. I have everything now. Everyone I care about is OK. That means I'm doing great."

"Well, you look terrible so stop being so smug," Dan told him. He actually thought he might cry. He felt responsible for what happened and relieved that Owen was going to be OK. Dan was a mess.

Owen could see it, and he pulled him down into bed with him. Dan made sure not to hurt him as he held onto him like he was his salvation. He realized how right Owen was. As long as Dan had Owen in his arms, everything was perfect.

Chapter 17

Dan had been sneaking down to Owen's bedroom for weeks. It started after he was hurt. Dan couldn't bear to be away from him all night. He told the girls that he would be studying in Owen's office at night in case they came looking for him. Every morning, Owen would wake him up early so he could sneak back upstairs. He even had to get up extra early on the weekends.

It was still a pleasure to wake up in Owen's bed. First Dan would become aware of his soft kisses on his lips, on his eyelids, on his chin and down his neck. Owen's sleep warmed body would press against him, as would his hard cock. It wasn't easy, but Dan kept his eyes closed in a very bad imitation of being asleep. Owen would whisper his name in his ear. His warm, rich voice sent a tremor through Dan's whole body. His arms reached up, out of his control. He had to hold Owen and kiss him. It was too hard to pretend he didn't want him more than anything.

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Owen was catching up on some work Saturday while Dan was at a meeting with a study group. Dan and Owen had taken the girls out for breakfast and a little shopping before he left, but they were ready for more fun.

"When is Dan coming back?" Connie asked. "He should take us somewhere. A boyfriend is supposed to take girls out to have fun."

"Dan isn't everyone's boyfriend, just mine," Owen told her.

"You can't just have Dan to yourself," Connie objected.

Maggie seconded that. "Dan is our manny!"

"We'll show you. We'll get our own boyfriend," Connie threatened.

"You're not allowed to have boyfriends," Owen told them.

"Why not?" Connie wanted to know.

"You're not old enough. And when you're old enough, I will inform you in writing," Owen told her very sternly. It was decades, no, eons too early for him to have to worry about that issue.

Dan came back just as Owen was finishing up his work. By the time the girls were through with Dan, Owen was ready for that fun the girls were demanding earlier. He was happy to hear Dan coming up behind him. Dan leaned down and nuzzled Owen at his desk.

"I heard you don't want to share me," Dan said.

"They don't want to let us have a minute alone," Owen grumbled then smiled suddenly. He was seeing a vision of a beautiful future. "I think we're a more complete family with you here. I'm looking forward to spending the holidays with you, and..."

"That better be a marriage proposal," Dan said suddenly.

Owen turned to stare at him. Dan looked very serious.

"Umm. Really? You want to marry me?" Owen still didn't believe what he heard.

Dan's eyes looked too earnest and solemn for him to be kidding around. Owen saw fear and hope in his expression, mirroring exactly how he felt.

"I guess if I want it done right, I need to do it myself," Dan said as he got down on one knee.

"Are you really going to propose?" Owen said, stunned. He couldn't believe this was happening.

"I'm not playing around. But this is just to tell you how I feel and what I want. You are going to get a deadly serious proposal with champagne, the works."

"I don't need deadly serious or champagne. Just say the words." Owen barely had enough breath to speak. He felt like he might pass out. With Dan on one knee in front of him, Owen was so happy and overwhelmed. "You're too beautiful," Owen had to tell him. Dan was a wonderful person who just happened to come in a body of a gorgeous man. Owen couldn't believe how lucky he was.

"Wait till I lay this awesome proposal on you that I'm thinking up right this minute while my head is spinning." Dan took a big, lungful of air before he spoke. "Will you love me forever the way I love you and make me the happiest man on earth?" Dan said in one breath.

"Yes," Owen said in a choked whisper. He sank to the floor and threw himself into Dan's arms, giddy, shaking, almost sobbing with pure joy. Held close and showered with kisses, Owen had never been happier.

They kissed each other for a long time. Now and then Owen had to stop and look at Dan to make sure this was real. Did the most beautiful man he ever met just ask him to marry him? Dan's loving, teary eyes convinced him that he did. He was real and he was Owen's.

"Let's do it again for the girls," Dan said.

Owen was still too dazed to refuse anything Dan wanted. They called the girls into the living room and had them sit down. As Dan got on one knee in front of him, Owen sat in the armchair, not trusting his shaky legs to hold him up.

Dan took his trembling hand. "Owen, you are my dream. Now I want you to be my future. Will you marry me and be the love of my life?" Dan said. His hands were shaking too.

Owen was just as overwhelmed as the first time. Sitting down was definitely a good decision.

"Say yes! Say yes!" the girls yelled before he could trust himself to speak.

"Yes. The answer is yes," Owen said and the girls clapped then rushed over to hug him and Dan.

"Do it again," Maggie said.

"Why not," Dan said.

Owen thought that was overkill, but then he saw it as an opportunity.

"I get to propose this time," Owen said. He kneeled and looked up at Dan. How could he put into words how much he loved him and wanted to marry him? "You make me so happy. I want to bring the same happiness to your heart that you've brought to mine. I want to give myself to you and love you forever. Please marry me."

"Say yes!" the girls yelled again.

Dan did then he kissed him, and the girls ran over again for hugs.

"Again, again!" Maggie demanded.

"No. That was plenty. It's a done deal," Owen said.

"I could propose to you all day," Dan said.

Owen kissed him lightly. "Now we'll have a wedding and live happily ever after. The End," Owen told the girls before they got another proposal out of them.

"Are you gonna go away to Greece?" Maggie asked, looking a little worried.

"No, they're staying here," Connie told her. She didn't seem to have any worries or doubts.

"That's right. How did you know?" Owen asked Connie.

"You told me," Connie said. "You promised you would always be here and you would never leave."

He had said it to her after Mike and Laura died. Connie was afraid that everyone was going to leave her. Owen made his promise then and meant every word. He was so touched that she remembered and that she took it to heart.

"That goes for me too," Dan told her.

"Good," Connie said like she expected nothing less.

Owen liked how sure she was of both of them. She knew where to place her faith.

Now that the girls had witnessed the big event first hand, it was time to let his mom know. Since their first date, Owen had told her about him and Dan. She approved completely. She had called Dan her future son-in-law even before Owen gave her the news about their engagement. Now she was overjoyed. Owen put her on speaker so they could all hear her tell him, "You couldn't have made me happier if you married George Clooney, Prince William and The Property Brothers in a big French wedding."

"All of them?" Owen said. That list had more to do with his mom than it did with Owen.

"Is that my competition?" Dan asked.

"Only in Mom's mind," Owen said, but he could hear how happy she was to have Dan in the family.

When she was speaking to Owen privately, his mom sounded more tearful. "I knew there was happiness out there waiting for you. I just knew it."

"It wasn't out there. You brought it home to me. Was that your plan all along?" Owen asked her.

"I was sure Dan was going to be good for all of you, but I know better than to try to arrange love."

"I'm going to give you credit anyway," Owen said.

"My sweet boy," she told him and he could almost feel her squeezing his cheeks.

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That night as they went to bed, Owen told the girls that Dan would be sleeping in his room from now on.

"Why?" Maggie wanted to know.

"I don't like the lonely room any more," Dan told her.

Maggie understood that reason, but Owen still gave her his own explanation.

"It's because I love Dan, and we're going to be husbands. And husbands sleep together."

She nodded again but with an uncertain look.

"It's a rule. They have to," Connie told her. "Married people have to sleep together."

"She's sucking all the fun out of this," Owen grumbled after they tucked in the girls.

"Not all the fun," Dan said and kissed him.

They hung around in Dan's room for a while for old time's sake and to

keep an eye on the girls until they were sound asleep.

It was very late by the time they went to Owen's bedroom. For the first time Dan was going to be sleeping with Owen until morning. No sneaking away. As they stood by Owen's bed, he hoped that Owen would still kiss him awake. Dan looked at his dark eyes and he was lost in him. Though all these years he had wanted him, Dan didn't know he could love him so much.

"Tonight you're all mine," he said as he took Owen in his arms.

"What do you mean tonight?"

"I'll show you what I mean," Dan said. He let his hands slide down Owen's sides then around to his ass.

"I'm yours forever," Owen said, and Dan felt his heart beating so hard at those words and even more at the idea that Owen was really his forever.

He kissed Owen quickly, not able to say anything. He was hardly able to breathe. Owen kissed him back, and his feathery, teasing kissed drove Dan insane. A few playful kisses were all Dan could take before he lunged at him and tackled him. They tumbled into bed together, kissing and pulling at each other's clothes.

They drew apart so they could look at each other as they took one another's clothes off. Dan couldn't get enough of Owen's mouth and the feel of him under his hands. Dan was drunk on his kisses. How much Owen wanted him in return wasn't only in the hardness of his cock. It was written on his burning skin, the shiver of his muscles, the quickness of his breath, the way his lips traveled Dan's body hungrily.

They melted together into one, sealing their promises to each other with their bodies. As they fucked, Dan was so high. He was touching heaven. This was a place where only Owen could take him. The love and ecstasy in Owen's eyes pushed Dan over the edge. He plunged into the sweet depths of Owen's body and the passion burning in his eyes. Owen said, "I love you," and Dan felt it with his whole being. His words were a wave that Dan wanted to drown in. It was amazing that someone he wanted and loved so much returned every feeling, making Dan love him even more.

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Dan had fallen asleep, but Owen was still awake. His eyes refused to close as long as they could get their fill of Dan. He couldn't believe it. Dan was naked in his bed, his for the night and for the rest of their lives. Owen had never felt so blissful and fulfilled in his life. He didn't even know he

could be this happy. And this was only their beginning. There was a wedding and holidays to look forward to, and Connie and Maggie to raise and fear. There were so many good things ahead. How happy could one man get? Owen couldn't wait to find out.

The End

Books by Trina Solet

And Manny Makes Three

Mark is a struggling college student who has been working as a nanny for a nice family, but they don't need him any more. Zack has been raising his son, Al, by himself and needs help. Al is a funny kid, and Zack is a funny dad, but more serious issues lurk under the surface. Will Mark be able to deal with these two? And how will Zack and Mark deal with their mutual attraction?

Unexpected Dad

Tyler finds a big surprise waiting on his doorstep. Ready or not, Tyler is a dad. Tyler didn't know he had a daughter until she suddenly dropped into his life. Whether he is ready for her or not, little Julie needs a father. Or maybe two. Tyler and Jake have been best friends, inseparable since college. Now they have to adjust to Tyler's new role as a dad. As Jake helps him cope with being a new father to a little girl, Tyler might be looking at two big changes in his life.

More Than a Manny

A very young, rich widower needs a nanny, but a hot manny would be even better. That's where Nate comes in. Brent is a loving but irresponsible father to two young children from a marriage of convenience. He needs Nate in his life, but how will Nate, a first time nanny, fit into his unconventional household? The kids are a handful, especially little Georgie. Her big brother, Ricky, has a few issues of his own. But Nate is more than ready to take on the challenge and let all three of them steal his heart.

Duncan the Third

Patrick and his little sister, Wendy, have just moved into Duncan's building and that means trouble. Patrick is exactly the kind of guy Duncan can't resist. Together he and his little sister might be the family Duncan has been yearning for but only if he takes a chance and lets them into his heart.

Unfortunately, Duncan hasn't been lucky when it comes to relationships. After getting his heart broken too many times, he has sworn off younger men. While Duncan struggles against his attraction to him, Patrick is determined to win him over. As Patrick tries to change his mind, can he also heal Duncan's broken heart?

His True Home

Alec has retreated to his childhood home after a life of too much fun. When a little boy is abandoned on the road leading to Alec's home town of Seaview Pines, Alec is the one who ends up taking care of him. Now Cory is on his way to join them. He was abandoned by his mother as well and wants to give Teddy, his little brother, the family he never had. As they spend time together, it's up to Cory to draw out the serious, silent little boy. He also has to convince Alec that his home town isn't just a temporary refuge. It's where all three of them belong.

Manny To The Rescue

Why would Owen be terrified of Connie and Maggie, his two adorable little nieces? Because he is about to be left alone with them. Owen thinks he is going to have to take care of his nieces by himself until Dan shows up. If Owen approves, Dan is ready to be the girls' manny. Right from the start, Dan is a big help and an even bigger temptation. And Owen isn't the only one being tempted. When he was younger, Dan had a crush on Owen. Now that he is living with him, Owen has never looked hotter. The crush is back in full force. Too bad Dan isn't the kind of guy Owen is into. But even a hint that he is interested might spur Dan to make a move. Unfortunately, Dan is bringing trouble with him, and he doesn't even know it. When Owen becomes a target, will Dan be there in time to save him?

Poison Heart

Is there anything Vince and Cal won't do for each other? The two of them grew up together and fell deeply in love. They were poor but happy until Cal made a big mistake and ended up in jail. He did it for Vince. To get him out, Vince is willing to do anything. Roland Granger has the power and influence to make Cal a free man. All he wants in return is Vince. Even if Cal never forgives him, Vince is willing to sacrifice himself. Now he has to make sure that Cal accepts this unwanted help. And while Vince is trying to set things right in his own life, can he reunite Roland with a self-destructive young man who loves him?

Make It Better

A favor leads to a life changing experience. Ray is willing to do anything for the man he considers his savior. His mission of mercy is Marcus, a young man who can't overcome his guilt over a tragedy in his past. Is Ray making a terrible mistake giving his heart to him, or will his love for Marcus be strong enough to bring him back?

My Love Is Real: The Benson Brothers Story

For almost a year Sean and Brian thought they were brothers. Sean wants him more than anything, but will Brian ever accept his love? His pride is only one of the obstacles standing in their way. A dangerous man has a claim on Brian.